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THE NIGHT OF MEMORY

A ROMANCE OF TO-DAY

By

EDMUND B. D'AUVERGNE

Author of

"Lola Montez," "The Light Side of London," etc.



Published at Clifford's Inn, London
By T. WERNER LAURIE LTD.

THE NIGHT OF MEMORY

CHAPTER I

It was a hot, slumbrous afternoon. In the beech-woods not a leaf was stirring. Even the birds had ceased their song, and the drowsy hum of insects hardly broke the silence. Where the German hills rose bare against the sky heavy clouds were mustering ; but the sun still glared fiercely on the broad white road that leads from Wiesbaden to Ems.

Keeping well in the shadow of the trees, a girl was walking briskly, swinging a cane as she went. A blue-bloused wood-cutter beside the road paused in the act of cramming half a pound of tobacco into the enormous china bowl of his pipe and croaked out some guttural greeting. The girl nodded, smiled brightly and passed on. The rustic gazed after her, stirred to sluggish admiration by her youth and freshness. “Engländerin !” he muttered, and fell to wondering whether Englishwomen owed their slenderness to taking long walks or to drinking so little beer.

Even a less discerning sage could not have mistaken the nationality of Rhona Melrose. Tall and slim, she

walked with the rhythmic grace which English-women of her class acquire by continuous moderate exercise. Her golden hair shone like burnished metal when the sunlight fell upon it ; little wisps and curls clustered round her ears and fell in feathery bunches. Her features were delicate and clear cut. If there was a piquant suggestion of frivolity in the slightly tip-tilted nose, it was corrected by a firm and determined chin.

Wasp-waisted Prussian officers and fat sword-scarred students sentimentalised over their beer about the dazzling fairness of her skin and her large dark grey eyes, in whose depths seemed hidden tears and laughter. Yet the expression on the pretty face was rather pensive than gay, and here and there a faint line spoke of pain and self-repression.

She had acquired nothing in the manner of her dress from the Germans among whom she lived. Indeed, the simplicity, and distinction of her gowns suggested the Rue de la Paix. Those in the secret knew that most of them were made in the flat at Wiesbaden, and were the work of her own deft fingers, aided by native good taste.

This afternoon she wore a frock of white embroidered linen that looked pleasantly cool in the sun-checkered forest. The short skirt showed a foot, shapely, but not too small, encased in neat white shoes. A broad-brimmed hat crowned with rosebuds shaded her face. Against the dark green and gold background she made a picture that would have made any artist eagerly whip out sketchbook and pencil.

She trudged on bravely, happy among the wooded hills which she had come almost to look upon as her own country. She loved nothing better than these lonely tramps through the forests of Nassau, which for

her were always peopled with the Erl King, the Wild Huntsman and the goblins of German folklore. The rumbling of the thunder assisted her fancy, and she glanced up, almost expecting to see the Valkyries riding the storm. She saw instead that a huge black cloud lay immediately above her, while some heavy drops announced that she was in danger of such a drenching as one only experiences in a German summer.

From end to end the sky was etched across with a pencil of fire. The woods trembled at the crash which followed. Down came the rain. Rhona dashed towards the nearest tree, and crouched against it for protection from the deluge. In this uncomfortable posture she remained half an hour, while the rain showed no signs of abating in violence.

Where the road crested a hill a motor-car appeared, travelling at a high speed towards her. In a few minutes she could see that it was a small two-seated car, painted a workmanlike grey. It was driven by its only occupant, a tall man smoking a cigar. The car was almost abreast of her when there was a report like a pistol-shot, followed by the instant application of the brakes. The tyre of one of the hind wheels had gone.

“Darn!” exclaimed the driver.

He sprang to the ground. As he bent over to examine the damage a spout of water from the hastily-adjusted hood caught him in the back of the neck, under the upturned collar of his coat. “Darn!” he exclaimed again.

Rhona laughed outright.

The stranger turned and looked at her. An imaginative man might have thought he saw a dryad in the charming white-clad figure, clinging closely to the tree-trunk; but he was not an imaginative man. He

saw in her instead the prettiest girl he could remember to have seen, and he also saw that she would presently be drenched to the skin. He raised his cap and stepped towards her.

She liked him at once. She liked his tall, lean figure, his looseness of limb and breadth of chest. She liked his lined, clean-shaven face, and his kindly brown eyes, which belied the stern set of his lips and chin. His long motor-coat was open and revealed a tweed suit of English cut. Clearly, she thought, this was a fellow-countryman. But his first accents undeceived her.

"I guess you are a trifle damp," he said, bowing slightly in the ceremonious manner towards women characteristic of Americans. "Will you accept the shelter of my car till the storm passes, if I can't offer you a lift to your destination?"

"How did you know I was English?" asked Rhona, instead of replying.

The man laughed—very pleasantly, she noticed. "How do you know I did? I might have taken you for an American. I've not seen a German like you anyway, and I don't expect to. Now step right into my car."

Rhona hesitated. She had all the English gentlewoman's dislike of an irregular acquaintance, and her experience of enterprising foreigners had taught her the necessity of standing very much upon her dignity. Still, she was uncomfortably conscious of the rain trickling off the edge of her hat, and wondered if it was spoiling her rosebuds.

"Well, I can't run away with you till I've fixed up that tyre," said the stranger, smiling at her hesitation.

"Thank you," said Rhona. "I shall be glad of

your hospitality—till the rain stops.” The American held the door open for her, and she leaned back on the leather-cushioned seat well out of reach of the shower. Her host busied himself with fixing on his spare tyre, and presently completed the job to his satisfaction.

“I mustn’t detain you longer,” she said, as he stood beside her. “The rain has nearly stopped.”

He looked round, turned his face upwards, and grudgingly admitted this. “But the road’s too wet for walking,” he added. “You had better let me drive you home. Have you walked far?”

“From Wiesbaden. That’s only six miles, but I don’t want to go back just yet. I am going on a long tramp.”

“Well, I’ll drive you wherever you want to go.”

Rhona laughed, and before he could dissuade her she had stepped out of the car.

The American stood with his hands in his pockets, his feet planted apart, regarding her with a mixture of admiration and perplexity.

“I’m very much obliged for your kindness,” said the girl. “Good-bye!”

She stepped away down the road without looking back. The American stared disconsolately after her. He could not resume his journey as the girl was going the same way, and an instinct of delicacy forbade him to overtake and leave her in his wake on the muddy road.

The girl was thinking of this also when she came upon a footpath leading into the forest on her left, and turned into it, leaving the road clear. A few seconds later she heard the car sweep by. She found herself regretting that the weather had improved so

soon. She confessed to herself that she would have liked to see more of this stranger.

Immersed in her thoughts, she blindly followed the path till it lost itself in a tangle of undergrowth. For a moment she meditated retracing her steps. Instead she plunged boldly into the forest, hoping to strike the Schwalbach road about a mile farther on.

Squirrels peered at her curiously from the branches ; once she caught sight of a wild swine grunting among the bracken. This part of the forest seemed unusually wild and deserted, and she reluctantly admitted to herself, was quite unknown to her. She pushed on at random. The brambles tore her pretty frock, and she found it more convenient to carry her hat in her hand. She was mounting a hill now, and she hoped when she reached the summit to take her bearings.

She had been wandering for nearly two hours when the raindrops announced the renewal of the storm. Picking up her skirt, she dashed up the wooded slope in search of shelter. She was brought up abruptly by a high wooden wall which extended to her right and left among the trees. She was about to follow it in order to find a door or gate when she noticed, a few feet above the ground, an aperture made as if by contact with a heavy body. She scrambled through with a schoolgirl's agility, and turning about let herself drop about four feet on the inner side.

She looked around in wonderment. She found herself in a vast shed occupied by what might easily have been mistaken for the skeleton of a gigantic bird. Mighty wings and ribs of steel or aluminium—in the dusk she could not tell which—outspread above her. Below and between them hung a car, in the sides of which were openings, like portholes.

It did not take the girl long to realise that she had

penetrated into the nest of a gigantic aeroplane of original and daring pattern. At present it existed only in the framework, but the meaning of the portholes was plain enough. They were intended for some sort of guns, and an apparatus already attached to the centre of the car suggested that they were to be fired and loaded by some electrical or automatic action.

Rhona was a soldier's daughter, and it is to be feared surveyed this terrible engine of destruction rather with curiosity and admiration than with the horror it should have excited in the humanitarian mind. She passed to and fro beneath it, studying it with interest, her hands behind her back. All at once she was pinioned from behind with considerable violence, and felt the muzzle of a rifle against her temple.

"Now, spy," hissed a voice in a guttural dialect. "Another step and you are dead."

Rhona looked along the barrel of the rifle into the mottled face of a helmeted soldier. She was conscious of another holding her wrists.

"It's all right," she said very calmly in German. "I am not a spy. I came in here to seek shelter from the rain. Take me to your commander and I will explain."

The soldier put down his rifle, and the other releasing her wrist, held her lightly by the arm. Both looked at her with a growing admiration which caused her vague alarm.

"The Herr Commandant won't be here till the morning," replied her captor. "The Sergeant you will see in about three hours' time, and you must make up your mind to pass the night here."

"Oh, this is absurd," cried the girl, and she stamped her foot. "Another case of spy fever. Will you at once telegraph to Miss Netherby at 25, Wilhelmsplatz,

Wiesbaden, and to the British Consul? I will pay you for your trouble. I am certainly not going to stay here all night."

The soldiers looked at each other. It was a long tramp to the nearest telegraph office. They had orders not to leave the station, and they had no wish to part with their charming captive.

They shook their round, close-cropped heads.

"Sorry, Fräulein, we can do nothing till the sergeant comes."

They led her out between them on to a broad terrace, overlooking a vast extent of forest. In the distance she could see the Rhine and the steamers ploughing its waters. She guessed this to be the destined landing stage of the great aeroplane. At the far end of the terrace was a smaller shed, evidently used as a guard-house. Into this she was conducted. The room was as cheerless as most places of the kind, but a bright fire was crackling in the grate as if newly-kindled. Before this her captors politely set a chair for her.

She bit her lip with mortification and alarm. She knew now that she had unwittingly discovered a state secret—the existence of this new warship of the air. Her presence in this remote corner of the forest would be almost impossible of explanation. Her nationality would also tell against her. To make matters worse, in a little rucksack which she wore slung from her shoulder, she carried a sketch-book. Then, too, she had scrambled through a hole in the wall, instead, as she now saw she might have done, of coming to the front of the building and asking for shelter. It would be hard to convince the most unsuspicious of German magistrates that she was not a spy. The lightest penalty she could expect would be two years in a fortress—no very pleasant prospect for a girl of twenty-

one. And of what use would it be, she reflected bitterly and scornfully, to appeal to her country—which had dishonoured her father as a traitor.

After some consultation together, the elder of the two soldiers took his rifle and left the shed. The younger leant against the wall, stolidly regarding her and fingering his pipe.

“Smoke if you wish to,” she said; “I don’t mind.”

He would probably have smoked if she had minded, but he took her permission as an evidence of friendliness and came nearer to her. Presently an idea occurred to her.

“You were sentry just now, were you not?” she inquired.

“Ja, Fräulein.”

“Do you patrol one side of the shed while your comrade patrols the other?”

“No, Fräulein. There is but one sentry for the whole circuit of the shed.”

“But it took ~~me~~ a long time to scramble up the slope on the other side. You ought to have seen me.”

The young fellow laughed uneasily. “Well, it was raining so hard, Fräulein——”

“That you kept to the shelter of the terrace. Yes, I see. Therefore, I was able to approach the shed and get through a hole in the wall and be inside a few minutes before you saw me. I wonder what they will say about that.”

The soldier paled and looked questioningly at her. Rhona stood up. “Listen,” she said, “I am not a spy. I strayed in there by accident. Look in my rucksack and satisfy yourself that I have not made any notes or drawings of your machine. A mere glance could not tell me much or be of any use to anyone. You know very well that you were not at your post,

and that this will be a serious business for you. I have about twenty marks in this bag, and this watch is worth, I suppose, another hundred. Take them and let me go. I swear to you that you will have done no harm to your Kaiser or your Fatherland."

The man was obviously impressed by this appeal. She tried a parting shot: "You will be censured—the credit of this arrest will go to your comrade."

The soldier looked about for another way out of the difficulty. "Of course, if it is proved that Fräulein is not a spy we should probably be blamed for excess of zeal."

"Exactly. You would be called fools, and that I am sure you are not."

"I will talk to my comrade."

The soldier went out, locking the door behind him. Through the tiny window Rhona could see him talking to the sentry. They pointed several times in her direction, and also down towards the forest. At last her gaoler returned.

"Give me your rucksack," he said.

She handed it to him, and slipped the watch into it at the same time. The soldier carefully examined the sketchbook, and, holding the bag upside down, shook it violently. He placed the twenty-mark piece and the watch somewhat shame-facedly inside his tunic, and tore the sketchbook in pieces, as if the blank pages might bear designs in sympathetic ink. Then he strode to the door. "I am going to see my comrade at the rear of the shed," he said. "The sergeant may return at any moment. Adieu."

He disappeared, leaving the door half open behind him.

Rhona stepped swiftly out on to the terrace. No one was in sight. For the first time she perceived a

flight of steps leading down to a path. She had gained the lowest of these when immediately in front of her loomed up the burly form of a bearded sergeant of engineers.

"What do you want here, Fräulein?" he demanded, barring her path.

"I—I have missed my way," stammered the fugitive. "I was caught in the rain, and——"

"Took refuge on the terrace. Did the sentry see you?"

"I don't know."

The sergeant noticed the girl's confusion. Also, in spite of Rhona's excellent German, he saw that he had to do with a foreigner.

"You are English or French, Fräulein?" he queried, politely enough.

"Yes," answered Rhona stupidly, "but I live in Wiesbaden."

"So! But as you speak our language so well you must certainly have understood the notices prohibiting anyone approaching within three hundred yards of this shed. There are explosives here which are very dangerous to civilians."

"I saw no notices."

"Ach, so! Then you must have come from the rear of the shed. You are a very adventurous young lady. I must ask you to give me the pleasure of a little conversation in the guard-house yonder."

"Nonsense!" protested Rhona, now on the verge of tears. She attempted to brush past the sergeant. He caught her by the arm. "Fritz!" he shouted.

The man whom she had bribed came running up. With a swiftness of comprehension for which Rhona would not have given him credit, he affected surprise at seeing her. "How did she get away?" he exclaimed.

"So you had already detained her?" said his superior. Then, turning to his prisoner, he asked, "Why did you not tell me that just now?"

"Because—oh, because you are idiots," cried the girl, and in spite of strenuous efforts burst into tears.

"What's all this about?" broke in a slightly nasal voice in very bad German.

The motorist had sauntered up the path and slapped the sergeant on the back familiarly.

Rhona turned to him with a rush of voluble English. "These idiots think I'm a spy because to get out of the rain I got into this shed and discovered their wretched old airship. Now they want to shoot me or imprison me for life in a fortress, I suppose. Please telegraph to my aunt at Wiesbaden—Miss Netherby."

"I can do better than that, I think," said the man slowly.

He turned to the sergeant. "This young lady is a friend of mine," he explained. "She came along to see me. She is no spy. You must let her go with me."

"Come to see you, Mein Herr? Why didn't she say so at first?" The sergeant looked from one to the other, and a broad smile crossed his good-natured face.

Rhona blushed with shame and vexation. She was on the point of indignantly rebutting the man's insinuation when her deliverer checked her with a warning glance.

"You don't understand, my friend," he said to the soldier. "This lady is my betrothed."

Instantly the sergeant sprang to attention. "I beg the gracious lady's pardon a thousand times," he said stiffly. "If zeal for the Fatherland——"

"That's all right," interrupted the American, taking

Rhona's arm. "Good night, my men." He turned to the girl at his side. "My car is at the foot of the slope—a few steps by this path. You must let me see you back to Wiesbaden."

The soldiers saluted. The girl bowed her head and, hot with embarrassment, walked down the path, her arm resting lightly within her rescuer's. Conscious of the awkwardness of the situation for a few minutes he said nothing. Then he apologized. "It was the only way out of it," he said.

"I suppose so," she admitted with averted eyes; then she turned her head and glanced at him curiously. "But you are surely not a German officer?" she asked.

"I? Why no. I'm Maurice Logan, late of New York city."

"But why did they release me, then, because you said I was engaged to you?"

The man laughed. "Well, you see I'm the inventor and designer of that wretched old airship as you called it. So they think it best to humour me."

"The inventor? Oh, I understand. I wish," she added awkwardly, "that I had looked at it more closely."

"Well, you seem to have looked at it quite long enough to have given them a pretty considerable scare. It's a big thing that little machine of mine and it's intended by the Kaiser as a pleasant surprise for some folks he knows of one of these days. Naturally he doesn't want it talked about. If the War Minister knew that an Englishwoman had been in that shed, I guess he'd have fits. Of course, it's unnecessary for me to ask you to forget anything you may have noted in there," added the inventor apologetically.

"I shall say nothing about it without your permission." Rhona checked a sigh. "I'm the last person

in the world to go out of my way to oblige the British government."

"Is that so? Well, here's my car."

The English girl paused as he held open the door. "I think I had better introduce myself," she said. "My name is Rhona Melrose, and I live with my aunt, Miss Netherby, at the Wilhelmsplatz, Wiesbaden. I am a student at the conservatoire at Frankfort. You see I'm quite a harmless person—poor and comparatively honest."

The American raised his hat and bowed. "I hope that I may count myself among your friends, Miss Melrose," he said, "and now I must take you home."

CHAPTER II

MISS VERONICA NETHERBY sat waiting for her niece in the little flat in Wilhelmsplatz, while a buxom, apple-cheeked maid laid the breakfast. She was a pretty, delicate-looking woman of five and forty. By Germans she was unanimously supposed to be ten years younger. She wore her hat, having been to take the waters, according to her practice at whatever watering-place she might find herself. She said they improved her accent.

The room in its arrangements, its decorations, in a thousand and one little touches, was thoroughly English. London magazines lay on the side tables, the pictures dear to English folk hung on the walls.

It is as easy for the leopard to change his spots as for the English to shed their nationality. The more conscious we are of foreign influences around us the more tenaciously do we cling to our language, to our old habits and ways of thought, even to our fashion of dress and our pastimes. All over the Continent, at Bruges, at Dinan, at Lausanne, at Wiesbaden, are scattered little colonies of British folk who find it cheaper to live there than at home. They keep very much to themselves, and live much as they might do at Bath or Cheltenham. They are largely composed of half-pay officers and retired civil servants, trim, grey-headed men, who have served the Empire in the most out-of-the-way corners of the globe, and may not since their

youth have spent more than five years altogether "at home." They get *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* by post every morning from London and look forward to the *Spectator* at the end of each week. They follow events in England with the keenest interest, while blissfully unconscious of what is going on around them. They wear English clothes, sent from London, or at least made by English tailors in Paris or Brussels. They get up sweepstakes for the Derby at the little "English Club," and become staidly excited as the day of the Boat Race draws nigh. Very often they never acquire the language of the people round them. Their wives and daughters organise bazaars in aid of the English church, read English novels exclusively, and play tennis incessantly. Pathetically enough, some of the youngsters have been born and bred in the country which their parents have chosen to reside in, and have never set foot in England. But their patriotism is of the most aggressive type, and it is they you will hear assuring the natives that the moon shines every night in England, and that it is nothing for an English sportsman to clear a couple of church steeples in the course of a day's run.

Glancing at the clock, Miss Netherby sighed and sat down to breakfast alone. She had taken the first sip of her coffee when Rhona walked in. She looked fresh as the summer morning in her white cotton frock.

She kissed her aunt and apologised for her lateness. "After all, I'm on holiday," she remarked in extenuation of her daily offence.

"I'm not going to chide you, my dear child," said Miss Netherby resignedly. "When you are as fat as the Frau Oberregierungspräsident on the next floor you will be sorry you did not heed my counsels. You

went to bed early enough last night. You were asleep when I came in from the concert. By the way, did you get soaked in that downpour yesterday afternoon? I noticed that you did not take your mack. You should consult a mental specialist, Rhona."

"The waters must have been more acid than usual this morning," retorted the girl sweetly. "Really, dear auntie, you should take a little sugar with them. No, I didn't get soaked yesterday. I got lost in the forest, and just as the storm came on a man passed in a motor-car——"

"Yes?"

"—and," continued Rhona, to her intense annoyance colouring, "he offered me a lift back, which I accepted."

"Obliging person. What sort of man was this motorist?"

"Oh, quite a nice person. An American. He wouldn't have dared to speak to me if I hadn't laughed when a jet of rainwater spouted down his neck. But I was quite maidenly and ladylike, and all that, I assure you."

The girl paused.

"He's coming here this afternoon," she went on a little nervously, "to call on us."

"Well, I shan't be in. I absolutely promised to have tea with Mademoiselle von Wenckstern. But I don't suppose he will mind. But who is he? Where does he come from? What does he do?"

"His name's Maurice Logan——"

"The flying man?"

"Yes. Have you heard of him?"

"I seem to. I was reading one of the German papers to-day"—a thing which Miss Netherby did very seldom. "They say that Germany will soon be

as strong in the air as she is on land. I wonder if Mr. Logan's over here on business?"

Rhona turned the faintest tinge of red. It was painful to her to deceive her aunt, but she was bound to do so in loyalty to her deliverer. "It does not sound unlikely," she murmured.

Her aunt meditated.

"It seems to me a wicked thing," she presently remarked, "to extend our strife into another element."

"I don't see that. It is no worse to fight in the air than on the sea. It would be very much better for all non-combatants if fighting were banished from the land altogether. The horses at least would be spared. I don't see why you should be down on Mr. Logan."

Miss Netherby raised her fine eyebrows. "My dear girl, I am not down on him, as you put it. If this sort of thing is to go on, all I hope is that England will not allow herself to be left far behind, as everyone says is likely to be the case."

"I don't see why you and I should care any more for England than for Germany."

"Only the fact is, Rhona, we both of us do."

A shadow crossed the girl's face. Her aunt was right. She knew she did care. Suddenly the possession of the secret of the new war aeroplane became a burden. The meal over, she went out on to the little balcony overlooking the *Platz*, and thought. It was odd that it should have fallen to her of all English-women to make this discovery. It was no business of hers she told herself. Still, it was unpleasant to know of this great engine of destruction preparing against her countrymen and to be unable to warn them.

Still, she was glad that chance had thrown her across the airman's path. She realized that she had thought of him almost continuously since their meeting. She

told herself that this was due to the romantic circumstances in which they had been brought together, but she wondered if they would have appeared to her quite so romantic if she had been rescued by another sort of Perseus ; by young Gumpstein, the violinist, who had pestered her with his Werther-like devotion at the Conservatoire, for instance, or the Ameriean dentist who had made love to her at Lucerne. She stood with her hands clasped behind her, looking out of the window, mentally appraising the stranger who had come into her life. Undoubtedly he attracted her. She wondered if she was going to fall in love with him or he with her. She doubted if she had ever been in love, and speculated on the chances of her ever seriously caring for any man. Love seemed to come to people in such very different ways and to affect them so differently. She and her aunt had never talked on the subject. They had seemed to agree tacitly that it was outside their lives. Rhona turned from the window with an impatient gesture and a frown, as if to say, " Bah ! I mustn't think of such nonsense."

But she continued to think of Mr. Logan, and found herself looking at the clock much more frequently than usual. The morning seemed to pass very slowly. She loitered in the Wilhelmstrasse, and then fled home abruptly, dreading lest he might come upon her unawares. Her aunt, noticing her fidgetiness at lunch, smiled ironically. " You had better hurry up " she remarked, " It's half-past twelve now, and your visitor may be here by four. You will have no time to dress."

Rhona affected to ignore her aunt's sarcasm, but she acted upon her advice all the same. She felt, somehow, very anxious to produce a good effect upon Mr. Logan. He had seen her all draggled with mud and

rain. He had caught her at an absurd disadvantage. Disregarding Miss Netherby's repeated counsels to hurry (shouted through the keyhole), she spent about two hours studying the effects of her various frocks. At three o'clock her aunt departed and she began to dress in earnest. Her toilette was not altogether completed when she heard the bell, and a moment after Logan inquiring for her in his queer German.

Cursing his punctuality, she kept him waiting another quarter of an hour. Then, having given the decisive pats to her hair and removed a too-pronounced patch of powder, she swept into the little salon, conscious that she looked charming. She saw that he thought so, too. As he rose he seemed to have grown longer and lither since their meeting the day before.

He took her hand and looked at her with undisguised admiration. "Fancy you coming on foot," she began in rather excited tones, "I expected you to come in your flying machine. I intended to have the chimneys cleaned, thinking you might come down that way. My aunt is out. She was most frightfully sorry at not being able to see you. You must excuse her. Do sit down. Will you have a cigarette now or after I've given you some tea?"

He was not listening to what she said. He looked into her sparkling eyes and contrasted her with the trembling harassed girl he had rescued from the soldiers' clutches less than twenty-four hours before. In his busy, varied life he had had singularly little to do with women—at least of Rhona's sort. He had had his adventures, like other men, but they had been fewer than fall to the lot of most. The young English lady, when he had reflected on the type at all, he had supposed to be a somewhat colourless young person, exceedingly self-controlled, and with no suggestion of the natural

woman about her. For all her Paris gown and town-bred manner this girl, he could see, was as much the elemental woman as any of the dark-eyed beauties who had smiled on him in Mexico or the golden-haired houris who had been so nice to him at Berlin.

He took the cigarette she offered him and lit the one which she placed between her own lips. His hand trembled a little as he did so. He felt suddenly awkward and shy. She, noticing this, began to talk rapidly, and rang for tea. He did not appear altogether accustomed to the meal, and obviously didn't know where to put his cup.

" You are not used to English people, are you ? " she asked.

" Well, no. I haven't mingled with them much."

Rhona removed the cigarette from her lips and considered him attentively. " What makes you—an American—build this machine for Germany ? " she asked.

Logan made a grimace. " The Almighty Dollar, I suppose ; and partly love of the thing."

" Yes, but you're not building model yachts. Suppose this thing were used against your own country ? "

" Oh, there's no fear of that. Germany and the States aren't going to quarrel, I guess."

" No, " said Rhona thoughtfully, throwing the end of her cigarette out of the open window, " but my country and Germany may."

The airman was silent. He had not considered this aspect of the matter in connexion with his new acquaintance.

" It's not very pleasant for me, " continued Rhona, " to be in possession of a secret which might conceivably be vital to my countrymen. Still, " she

added as an afterthought, "I don't know why I should care."

Logan looked on the carpet and then at a picture on the wall. "You see," he said, "I offered the plans to Washington first and they refused them. So of course I was free to trade them elsewhere."

Rhona reflected. Then she laughed. "You have a liberal way of looking at things. Somewhat like the old soldiers of fortune."

The man flushed and bit his lip. He looked down and then straight into the girl's eyes. "You look on me as just a mercenary?" he challenged.

Rhona shrugged her shoulders. "I really haven't considered the question. If you can reconcile this sort of thing with your own sense of patriotism it isn't for me to blame you."

"I don't know that I have any sense of patriotism, Miss Melrose," came the deliberate avowal.

"Oh, I know what you are going to say, Mr. Logan: that one country is as good as another, that nationalities are merely the accidental creations of imperfect means of intercommunication, and that humanity is our country. Of course I know that that is all true, and that a great deal of cant is talked about nationality; but you see all my ancestors have been soldiers. This sentiment of devotion to one's particular country is in my blood. Perhaps I'm a sort of throwback; but there it is."

She looked at him defiantly. "I can't pretend," he said, "that my indifference is due to the reasons you have given, though they sound rather convincing. No. The fact is I haven't got a country of my own."

Rhona Melrose stared at him in surprise. "Why, did you drop from the clouds?"

"I have often done that, but I don't think I arrived

on this planet in that way." He thrust his hands into his pockets, spread out his long legs, and looked fixedly at the tips of his boots.

"But you told me you were an American?" said Rhona, greatly wondering.

"Pardon me, I didn't. I said I belonged to New York City. I don't know what I am. I take myself to be between thirty-three and thirty-seven. Perhaps I'm younger, for the world has knocked me about a bit. But, as far as my recollection goes, I'm a child to you. My memory extends back only twelve years."

"You mean that you lost your memory?"

"Absolutely. You have no doubt read of such cases. In the hospital at Barbadoes there is a sailor who has not uttered a single word since he was left there by a ship from Scotland seven years ago. Who he is, no one has the least idea. He has totally forgotten his name, his language, his country—everything. I'm in a better plight than he, at all events. May I tell you my story? It seems kind of foolish to inflict it on you, but I want to rid you of that bad opinion of me." He spoke almost wistfully.

"Please tell me; and do smoke. I shan't feel you are comfortable till you do."

Logan lit a fat cigarette. Leaning back in his chair he began in his slightly drawling voice.

"My first impression of this world was not agreeable. It was very like what some people fear will be their first impression of the next. It was a sickening smell of sulphur. I was in pitch darkness. Something was beating a drum steadily within my head. Something else held me pinned at the waist. I wrenched myself free and stood up. My head struck a flakey substance, which gave way. I was dazzled by a ray of light, and the next instant almost blinded by a shower of ashes.

I had pushed my head through a beam burnt to a cinder.

"Some instinct impelled me to draw myself up out of my prison. A fierce sun blazed above me. To my right a vivid blue sea was rolling and tumbling. Straight before me rose a huge mountain. At short intervals it volleyed forth dense clouds of smoke and rivers of thick mud, which rolled down the side towards me. A horrible belching and rumbling came from that mountain. I seem at times to hear it still.

"I looked round as a chicken may on emerging from its shell. I guess few men's first recollections are quite like mine. I stood on a vast heap of formless ruins. Smashed masonry, houses rolled up inside each other and then torn asunder, metal and glass fused into balls, every conceivable article broken and distorted, lay around me in an indescribable chaos. Flames were devouring a few remains still upstanding. Everything was sprinkled over with ash.

"I stood like the last man on the ruins of the world and stared up at the sun. I took a step forward and stumbled. I had nearly fallen over the corpse of a young girl, who lay with her hands across her face as if to protect it. Then I kept on stumbling over bodies and fragments of bodies."

The listener shuddered. Logan noticed this, and knocking the ash off his cigarette, resumed : "The curious part is that I do not remember to have thought about all this. I suppose I took all the ruin and devastation for granted, just as the chicken would have done. I was conscious only of intense hunger and thirst. I suppose I was mad. I ran down towards the water's edge, possibly with the intention of drinking the sea. I saw a boat coming towards me. I knew it was a boat and that there were

men in it. I stumbled again, and for a time remembered nothing.

"I awoke to find myself in a hospital ward. A sister of mercy was watching me. She came over to me and said something in a language I did not understand. Then she fetched a man—a doctor—who spoke to me in English, though with a strange accent. This I understood. I told him I was hungry. They brought me some broth, which I ate ravenously. I felt very much stronger.

"The doctor, after questioning me as to how I felt, asked my name. I was puzzled, and could not remember. He told me not to mind, that I should recall it presently. I asked him where I was. He said that I was in the hospital at Port Antilles. He told me that I had had a marvellous escape.

"He went away. I slept and rested. Next day I asked how I came to be there. I could remember nothing. Yet I understood well enough when they told me that I was on the Island of Palmiste, in the West Indies, and that I was the sole survivor of the volcanic eruption which had destroyed the town of St. Paul at the other end of the island. But I heard it all as something new—just as you doubtless read it in the newspapers.

"I was the sole survivor. . Thirty thousand people had been wiped out of existence in ten seconds. And the same cyclone of flame and lava had wiped them and the town out of my memory. How I had come to be in St. Paul, who I was, what I had been doing there, were questions to which I could supply no answer. Yet I was otherwise in full possession of my faculties. I spoke English, I could read and write, I conducted myself like a civilised being. I appeared to have been well educated. Probably I had forgotten

a good many things besides those personal to me. I recollect, for instance, that I was puzzled by an allusion in a newspaper to Queen Victoria, and only learnt who she was by reference to other columns of the paper. One unconsciously absorbs so much general knowledge of this sort in a few days from newspapers and the talk around one that it is difficult to say how much of it came as fresh to me and how much I had remembered from my obliterated past. As regards these outside things I was much in the position of an intelligent man who finds himself dumped down in a utterly strange land. The names of places and persons would be unfamiliar to him, but he would soon understand that so-and-so was a king or a general, and that X was a big town. He would soon get his bearings, and so did I.

“I tried again and again to recollect who and what I was. The doctor told me not to bother about it, as it might drive me mad. He said that one of these days some object or name or person would bring it all back to me. That has not happened yet.”

Rhona for the first time interrupted : “But were there no indications of your nationality at least on your clothes?”

“My clothes had been practically burnt off me. When I was strong enough I revisited the scene of my deliverance from death. I learned that it was the site of a small hotel much frequented by Americans. The room in which I had been at the time of the eruption had evidently dropped clean through into the cellar and the upper stories falling on top of it had marvellously enough preserved me. In the deep impression made by my body I did find something. It was a drill jacket—or rather part of one—matching with the remains of my trousers. The pocket was left, and in it I found the photograph of a woman.”

"Of a woman? Ah," exclaimed Rhona.

"I have that photograph still," continued Logan. "There is nothing about it to reveal the nationality or even the precise period of the sitter except that she was evidently a European. It gave me not the slightest clue to my own identity."

"Was she pretty?"

"Some would even call her beautiful, Miss Melrose. But it is not the kind of beauty that appeals to me. My search satisfied me that I was a stranger to the island, and that the probabilities were in favour of my being an American."

"Did your accent confirm that idea?"

"It never occurred to me to ask anyone. It was a French island, remember, and probably the natives wouldn't have been able to distinguish between an American and an English accent. And the circumstances were not favourable for an inquiry into my antecedents. There wasn't a soul in Palmiste who wasn't in mourning for some relative or friend lost in the disaster. Who was there to bother about a lad of twenty-two or twenty-three who had not a suit of clothes to stand up in and did not know his own name?"

"Poor you," murmured Rhona.

"As I was uninjured they told me I was discharged from hospital. I went to the relief fund. I had to give a name of some sort. I pitched on the first name I came across in an American newspaper—Logan. It was the name, I think, of some newly-elected congressman. I took the name Maurice out of compliment to the French doctor who had looked after me. They gave me a job as watchman over a part of the ruins. As I stood there at night leaning on my rifle and surveying that awful scene of desolation, it seemed to me that I was myself a ghost mounting guard over my

real self buried somewhere there down below. But whose ghost I was I never knew.

"It may seem strange to you, Miss Melrose, but after a little while the mystery of my identity ceased to trouble me. I was young and strong. Whatever my past had been, clearly the greater part of life lay before me and not behind me. What I could not remember I could not regret. When I saw everyone around me sorrowing for the loss of their dead friends I began to think I was rather lucky in having no one to mourn. I wanted to see the world which I had forgotten. I worked my passage on a ship to Hayti. There was, as usual, a revolution on hand. I took a side, and handling artillery one day was surprised to find that I understood the construction and mechanism. As I was the only man in that rabble that did so, they made me a general. You may smile, but it was so. Literally I, a penniless lad, who did not know his own name, was a full-fledged general in the constitutional army of Hayti—the only white man in its ranks—with a cocked hat and a sash. I should have had a uniform in due course, but we were bust up before they had time to fit me. The other gang came down on us one night and crumpled us up in great shape. I see now that I might have changed sides and carried our only gun over to the victorious faction. Instead, I swam out to a United States cruiser, with my cocked hat firmly planted on my head—it was a shade too small—and my few belongings rattling inside it. They laughed at me a good deal, and at last put me ashore at New Orleans. So I came, whether for the first time or not I shall never know, to the land I call my own."

Logan broke off his narrative and lit another fat cigarette. "Now," he said, with a grim smile, turning

to his companion, "you know why I cannot sympathise with your sentiments about country. I have no country. America is just the first place I struck where they spoke my language, and where I seemed to understand the customs. I hear you talk about patriotism, and it sounds fine. But it means no more to me than talk about colour does to a man born blind."

"It's rather nice of you to tell me all this," said Rhona warmly. "Now, will you forgive me for what I said?"

"Why sure,"—the man smiled into her face and held the hand she tendered him—"I don't remember that you said anything that demanded an excuse. It's I who ought to apologize to you for telling you this long yarn."

He rose, reluctantly she fancied, and stood beside her.

"I wonder now," he asked almost wistfully, "if you would care to come for a drive with me tomorrow—say, to Biebrich?"

Rhona accepted without the least hesitation. "I should be charmed," she said.

"That's real good of you. Well, I'll be round at half-past three. Till then—good-bye, Miss Melrose."

She heard him go downstairs. Then she lit another cigarette. "A strange history," she mused. "I wonder who he really is. But I *do* like him!" and at the unspoken words she flushed deeply.

CHAPTER III

"It's all very irregular, not to say improper," remarked Miss Netherby with an imperfectly-hidden yawn. "Nice girls don't go racing about the country with men they have picked up in the forest two days before."

"You put things awfully nicely, auntie," retorted Rhona with some asperity. "'Picking up!' What an expression for a clergyman's daughter to use! However, if you think it wrong of me to go motoring with Mr. Logan alone, by all means come yourself. We shall be charmed to have you."

"The invitation does not seem to have been framed so as to include me, dear. And please don't get wild. I have really no feeling in these matters at all, as you know, but I find a certain relief to my conscience in these formal protests. But don't let him take you up in his flying machine. There was a song about a girl who eloped in one. I daresay you remember it."

"I am surprised that you should ever have heard it. It was a most vulgar song. It went like this——" Rhona went over to the piano and played a few bars. "I don't know where you can have been brought up, auntie."

These passages of arms were frequent between aunt and niece. They were conducted with perfect good-humour on both sides, and formed an agreeable relief

to the monotony of their daily existence. Miss Netherby was certainly not a very exacting chaperone, but her laxness was not altogether due to indolence or indifference. They had lived so far removed from masculine influence that she saw men like trees—only as features in the world's landscape, impotent to disturb their tranquil atmosphere. Women of different ages may live together for years without ever revealing to each other the stirrings or longings of sex. It never occurred to Miss Netherby that her niece might have passions such as she read of daily in books and newspapers. She would have scouted such a suggestion, remarking that the girl had too much sense. Certainly she remembered certain episodes of Rhona's school-days, but she was convinced that she had outgrown that nonsense long ago. There was that in the girl's rounded, almost voluptuous form which would have suggested possibilities of love and love-making to any man, and not a few women, but it is safe to say that such an idea had never once presented itself to her aunt. She supposed Rhona to be capable of flirting in a rather metallic, Southsea manner with eligible young men on proper occasions, such as dances or in a box at the theatre. She had never even thought of her getting married during her lifetime, at least. Rhona, of course, liked men for the distractions and entertainment they could procure her. That was all, her aunt was sure. She knew that she had received at least one declaration of love with a peal of laughter. There was no danger of such a girl becoming entangled with any man. Therefore, to exercise too close a supervision over her movements would be an absurd and troublesome compliance with convention.

Assured of her niece's discretion, she did not on this occasion even deem it necessary to defraud herself

of her siesta in order to make Mr. Logan's acquaintance. Rhona, looking very tantalising in a big hat swathed round with a gauze veil, met the airman on the steps. "I must again apologise for the non-appearance of my aunt," she began. "I really have one. Having no other relatives, I ought to make a better show of her. At the present moment—unless the row made by your car has awakened her—she sleepeth."

"Miss Netherby's by no means to be disturbed on my account," protested Logan.

"Oh, that's all right. I wasn't going to disturb her. We take turns to sleep, she and I. I wake up about eleven in the morning and get lively at midnight. She gets up about five to take those horrible waters, and as a result can't keep awake after three. If I were not a well-conducted girl," added Miss Melrose as an afterthought, "the arrangement might have its advantages."

Mr. Logan thought so, too, but with true American primness decided not to say so. He assisted Miss Melrose into his tiny grey car, which had been compared to a bath-chair on a chassis, and busied himself in tucking the rug round her. Reminding him that it was an August afternoon, she rejected these attentions. But there was a nip in the air which brought the flame into her cheeks as they sped out into the open country.

"I have not repeated what you told me yesterday to my aunt," she informed him. "I presume you want it kept secret."

"Sure. I knew I could rely on your discretion. You did not tell her how we came to meet either, I guess?"

"I told her nothing about the aeroplane and my

arrest—of course not,” she answered. “ I simply told her that I was overtaken by the rain in the forest and that you had given me a lift.”

He smiled with pleasure, and she knew that he was exulting at the sense of intimacy these secrets between them seemed to create. She felt a queer thrill herself. For that matter, she caught herself trembling slightly whenever he touched her.

“ We have had some bad scares lately,” he observed, “ so you must excuse this apparent excess of caution. Somebody has got wind of my little invention.”

She laughed. “ I wasn’t the first spy then ? ”

“ I guess not. We found footprints near the terrace the other day hard to account for. Then in the rear of the shed—the way you seem to have come—we found a tree with a branch broken off, as if someone had tried to get a glimpse of what was going on inside and had a spill in consequence. There were the marks of a single foot on the turf as if the spy had gone limping away. That has put us all on the alert. Though, to judge from the ease with which you got in, my friend Fritz doesn’t seem to have kept a very good watch. I guess I’ll have him shifted.”

Rhona decided to say nothing of her conversation with the sentry or of how it ended, feeling sure that Logan would demand condign punishment for the man.

“ Why did you get me away ? ” she asked, turning round and looking at her companion. “ How did you know I was not a spy after all ? ”

Logan seemed for a moment to deliberate. “ Well,” he said slowly, “ I could see you were not a spy. You didn’t look that kind. I could see that you weren’t mean,” he concluded with conviction.

She was silent. The secret which a moment before she had rejoiced in as a bond between them seemed

to weigh heavily upon her. Her countrymen, perhaps, were risking their life and liberty to penetrate it. Yet she was on his side, not theirs. Was she always, she asked herself, to be opposed to her own country?

It was a passing cloud, which was almost immediately dispelled by their arrival at the pleasant little riverside town of Biebrich. The Rhine shone gold and green in the brilliant sunlight. A ray caught the gigantic figure of Germania yonder on the Niederwald Hill. Music reached them from the deck of a passing steamer. It was a scene full of brightness and animation.

They left the car at a garage, and strolled into the beautiful park adjoining the deserted palace of the old Princes of Nassau. They paced the forlorn-looking alleys and crossed the knee-high grass to gaze into the depths of the weedy fish-pond. They talked as men and women do in the first stages of attraction, when they are desperately anxious to interest each other, and unconsciously throw open the doors of sympathy for love to enter.

Rhona talked about her wanderings on the Continent from one watering-place to another, of her girlish escapades at pensionnats at Lausanne and Godesberg, of her experiences at the Conservatoire. It was a simple relation in itself, but constantly illumined by the girl's flashes of wit and love of fun. Logan smoked and listened, a smile now and then playing round the corner of his mouth. He had very much less to say. Then she began to talk about books, and was delighted to find that he hadn't read any ; so she was then permitted to recite to him the plots and choicest passages of her favourites. This is a dangerous occupation for a man and a maid. When they left the old sweet-scented pleasure they had firmly welded their minds and hearts together.

They had tea on a terrace overlooking the Rhine. Rhona chatted and laughed, and moved Logan to mirth by warning him not to order more cakes than they actually wanted, as at this restaurant they would have to pay for all that the waiter brought. She had had tea here before, she told him, with a party of girls from the Conservatoire. Yes, and occasionally with the men students, too. Logan wanted to know a great deal about these musical gentlemen, but Rhona had not much to say about them. They had never interested her, and she was thinking only about him.

"Let's go on to Rüdesheim," Logan suddenly suggested. He had become silent and preoccupied. When his hand touched hers in handing back his cup her cheek crimsoned. Her pulse was beating very fast. She knew, somehow, that they were heading for a crisis. She assented with a nod.

As they stepped into the car, Logan exchanged salutes with a party of officers entering the restaurant. One of them, a grey-haired man, wearing the undress uniform of a general, looked long and curiously at Rhona. She remarked on this to Logan.

"He is the Commandant of Mayence," he explained. "I don't blame him for looking at you as long as he was able."

But both were too absorbed in each other to think any more about elderly Prussian officers.

It was darkening fast. The green water turned to indigo, the golden streaks upon it to bronze and deep red. The castles stood out, fantastic and gaunt, against the dying sunset. The river and the opposite shore became dotted with lights.

The little car flashed through village after village, nestling between the vineyards and the Rhine. Rhona ceased to take count of them. She leaned back in

exquisite content. At the foot of the Germania monument they plunged into the heart of the forest, speeding along down an endless avenue with no light but that of the car and the stars overhead.

"I don't know where we are going," said Logan. "I guess it doesn't matter."

His voice told her everything.

"No, it doesn't matter," she murmured.

A quiver passed through them both. They seemed to be alone in the world together. Around them was only Nature, the eternal lover and mother of lovers.

They emerged on to a circular clearing, whence through the branches they could see the river. He halted the car and looked down at her.

"You are in love with me, aren't you?" she said to him suddenly, leaning forward and looking up into his face.

"Yes; you know that. I'm just crazy about you."

She sank back among the cushions and laughed happily.

"You saw me for the first time the day before yesterday!"

"Well, that's not my fault."

He pulled her forward and looked almost fiercely into her eyes.

"You love me, too, Rhona, don't you?"

"Yes, I love you, Maurice."

Their lips met in a long kiss. Again the girl sank back and closed her eyes.

"Oh, my lover—you man of the air and the volcano and the forest—kiss me again!" she cried.

He kissed her again, and yet again. They were very long, deliberate kisses. She threw her arms round his neck, and felt that she was surrendering herself, body and soul, to him. Then with a long happy sigh she withdrew her lips.

They looked at each other. "Oh, this is absurd," she cried, "we have only known each other two days!"

"Two days!" He laughed, "Why, dear, I have longed for you all my life!"

Then all the joy and warmth went out of her. She sat up rigid.

"All your life!" she cried bitterly, "why, you were that other woman's! She whose photograph you kept next to your heart."

"She!" cried the man, startled. "Oh, my dear, do you suppose she was anything to me?"

"How do we know? Oh, my God, how I hate her!"

Rhona stamped her foot and clenched her hands. "Who was she? Why did you tell me about her? You have spoiled it all—you fool!" She pushed him from her.

"Listen," he said. He seized both her hands.

"Maybe I was a fool to tell you; only I wanted to have no secrets from you. I had to unlock my heart to you. I'd have told you if I'd been a murderer. It is you who talk like a fool. What is that woman to you and me? We love each other." He laughed.

"You can't deny that now, Rhona Melrose. The other woman's a portrait, a mere phantom. Who was she? I don't know and I don't care. She belongs to the dead past—to the past that is buried six feet deep beneath ash and lava out there at Palmiste. You belong to me and I to you."

"She may have been your wife—she may be still."

"What makes you say such a thing at such a moment? I have never dreamed of it. Rhona, quit torturing yourself. I wish to heavens I had never told you."

"I wish you hadn't. For Heaven's sake drive on and end this."

Tears were streaming down her face now. Logan sat there puzzled, frustrate, the cup dashed from his lips. They were both suffering horribly. She knew herself that the suggestion was cruel.

"Why on earth must you tell me your hateful secrets?" she burst out. "First that wretched machine; then—this!"

He drove on. Her body shook with dry sobs. Then he slackened speed again.

"Oh, go on," she cried petulantly. "I am a fool, an idiot. I have been mad to-night. I shall die of shame over this to-morrow. If you say another word to me I shall scream."

If anything at all relieved the pain of these two lovers, it was the darkness that hid their white, strained faces from each other. Logan drove on doggedly at furious speed. They found themselves at the spot where they had first met.

"I wish we had never seen each other!" snapped Rhona viciously.

The man had by this time recovered some of his composure.

"I think you are crazy," he said almost sternly. "We shouldn't have loved each other then, and you know very well that you are glad to know that now."

She was silent. "Deny it if you can," he challenged.

"I don't deny it."

"Well, how do we stand?"

"Oh, I don't know. Do you want me to go into hysterics?"

The threat of hysterics unnerves the bravest of men and will reduce the stoutest of the sex to obedience. Logan bit his lip and relapsed into silence. Rhona saw with relief that they were entering the streets of Wiesbaden.

"For goodness sake put the hood up," she adjured him. "I look a frightful sketch."

While he obeyed her she produced a miniature looking-glass. Logan, with a half-smile, handed her a pocket electric lamp, by the light of which, with a few quick touches, she removed the traces of her emotion. "I always seem to leave you like this," she blurted out with something between a laugh and a sob.

They had now reached the Wilhelmsplatz. "When shall I see you again?" asked Logan, with an accent of determination, as they halted outside her house.

"Don't ask me. Perhaps never."

Before he could detain her she had sprung from the car, and was running up the steps.

She let herself in with her own key. She slipped at once into her room and shut the door. The servant knocked and informed her that Miss Netherby had gone to a concert at the Kursaal, and had had her dinner.

This was no small mercy. She found dinner laid for her, but presently gave up all attempts to eat. She lit a cigarette and walked restlessly about the room. Then dreading the notice of the apple-cheeked maid, she again sought refuge in her bedroom.

She sat at her writing-desk and rested her hot cheek on her fist. Her predominant emotion was exasperation—exasperation against herself, exasperation against fate. "That love should have come to me like this," she murmured, "to think that I should have given way like that." She had never supposed herself to be one of those passionless, unemotional creatures who had fulfilled the ideal of true womanhood when her aunt was young, but she had never yet been scratched by the darts of the little blind god.

She had not wanted for lovers. They had been

more numerous than her aunt supposed. At her boarding-school at Lausanne an English boy from the school next door used to throw boxes of chocolate, with amatory verses hidden inside, over the wall to her. When she was seventeen a lank Cambridge graduate, whom she had met at a hotel, had astonished her by falling on his knees before her as they were climbing the stony paths of the Rigi together. Two German students at the Conservatoire had passed a pleasant afternoon in a Bierlokal, slashing each other's faces on her account. To one of them, oddly enough, she was indebted for an acquaintance with a most elegant hussar officer, who took her driving in a very English turn-out and vowed that he loved her desperately, although she was an Englishwoman. To all these she had listened with curiosity, generally mingled with amusement, and sometimes with contempt. They had all gone away reproaching her with her cruelty and her coldness. And suddenly love had caught her in its flame and was burning every fibre of her being.

She had asked him if he loved her. She burst into a wild laugh. Certainly she had never thought herself capable of that. Yet she was not in the least sorry. She was ashamed—yes, she had to confess that—but she was glad. She thought of their kisses, and her cheeks flamed, but she liked to think about them.

She rose and stood in the middle of the room, her hands clenched, staring with unseeing eyes before her. "It's no good," she muttered under her breath, "I love him and he loves me. This has got to be faced."

Yes, she wanted Maurice—she wanted him horribly. She longed for the touch of his long brown hands,

the sound of his drawling voice. "And I don't know, after all," she whimsically mused, "whether it's his turned-up collar and his soft grey hat that I'm not in love with as much as with him."

If only he had not told her about that other woman!

"She doesn't matter," whispered one voice—was it love's? "She does matter," hissed another voice—was it that of prudence or duty or jealousy? "She may start up at any moment from anywhere to tear you from his arms."

Yet, was that all? He was working against her country. She went back to her desk and looked fixedly at the portrait of her father clad in his British uniform—the uniform she had not seen for thirteen years. She thought how ill England had requited his services, and her face hardened. Why should she care about her country? Logan was more to her than many Englands. The eyes beneath the forage cap seemed to reproach her. That was not the way he would have had her think. He had died protesting his love for his country. Not to avenge him, but to justify his name before his countrymen—that was her duty.

"What right have I to think of love or marriage till that is done," she reminded herself. "I must put everything else from me. I will not bring the man I love a dishonoured name."

A prey to such conflicting emotions, Rhona Melrose would have been wise to suspend all action till to-morrow. But she was an impulsive woman. She took up paper and pen, and in her large, rather sprawling handwriting wrote :

"DEAR MR. LOGAN,—I want you to blot out all that has passed between us to-day. I agreed to

forget the precise circumstances of our first meeting, so I presume you will do as much for me. As to our further acquaintance, I do not know"— the writer hesitated. "Later on, we may meet on a formal footing, but I do not want to see you for some time.

"RHONA MELROSE."

She addressed the note and walked across the little platz to post it. She had no sooner done so than she regretted it. She ran up to her room again. Her nerve deserted her, and, throwing herself on the bed, she let her tears flow.

Bed was obviously the safest refuge. She undressed with frantic haste and got between the sheets. She had hardly done so when the maid tapped at the door.

"Yes? I'm in bed, Gretchen."

"A commissionnaire has just brought a letter, Fräulein."

"Bring it in," cried Rhona, switching on the light. The servant entered, and looked curiously at her young mistress's tear-stained face and the garments thrown in disorder on the floor. She handed Rhona a large square letter and withdrew.

Rhona tore open the envelope. Four pieces of yellowish paper fluttered on to the counterpane. She picked them up and quickly pieced them together. They were the fragments of the portrait of which Logan had told her.

"As if that did any good!" she murmured. But her face wore a happier expression as she turned out the light.

Five minutes after she switched it on again, and, sitting up, examined the photograph attentively.

It represented a woman of southern type, perhaps about twenty years of age. Her luxurious black hair

hung loose over her bare shoulders and bosom. Her eyes were magnificent, dull but sensuous. As Logan had said, there were no ornaments or draperies to afford any evidence of the country or the period to which she belonged.

Rhona sprang out of bed, and, moved by an impulse which she would have found it hard to define, stood before the long mirror surveying herself. The thin nightdress hardly concealed the beauty of her form. Yes, she was beautiful. She realised it with a sigh of thankfulness. She had never considered herself in this way before. She had known she was pretty—had studied the effect of countless frocks and hats upon herself, but never till now had she frankly appraised the beauty of her body.

The blood crimsoned her face and neck as she turned from the glass. "I am more beautiful than she," was her unspoken verdict as she settled her head once more on the pillow.

CHAPTER IV

LOGAN awoke early next morning with the consciousness that a great joy had been his. Rhona's kisses still seemed to linger on his lips, her words, "I love you, Maurice," still made sweet music in his ears. He stretched out his arms as if to embrace her. The moment after he realised that the cup had been dashed from his lips at the first sip. He winced at the thought. The more vivid his recollection of his first taste of love the more unendurable was the thought that the first taste must also be the last. He longed for the English girl more than he had longed for anything else in all his life. It was unthinkable that, having confessed her love for him, she should now thrust him away from her for ever. Logan cursed the unknown woman whose portrait with such savage glee he had torn in pieces overnight. That she should rise out of the impenetrable night of his youth to tear his love from him was maddening. The thing, he told himself, was absurd. He recollected all that he had read about the caprices of women in love. Doubtless by this time Rhona had already come to her senses. Had he been a more experienced lover he would have seen no cause for alarm. Whatever objections she might raise he vowed he would overcome.

"I have generally got what I have wanted," he reflected, "and I will get her."

To pass the hour before breakfast he rose and walked

down to the Kochbrunnen. Though not yet seven, people of all ages and nationalities were thronging to take the waters from the hands of the buxom dippers. Others, like himself, had come to look on or to listen to the music. Logan watched the water-drinkers with amusement. The expressions of some indicated the extreme of nausea and disgust, others had obviously to screw up their courage to take the draught, and then looked round with a cheerful smile, as if to say, "Not so bad after all." Some old gentlemen pressed forward eagerly and drained their glass with evident relish, hurrying off to inform their doctor that they felt ever so much better for it.

Logan returned to his hotel, where he breakfasted in his room. He found a heavy mail spread out on the table. He was wholly unacquainted with Rhona's handwriting, so it was by the merest chance that hers was the third or fourth letter which he opened.

"I want you to blot out from your memory all that has passed between us—" he read. He laughed. "It will take another eruption of Mont St. Paul to do that," he muttered, "I wonder if she will find it so easy to forget my kisses? 'I do not want to see you for some time'—that's a lie, Rhona Melrose. You do want to see me, and pretty bad, too."

Again he thought of their kisses, and an expression of pain passed over his face. His chin looked more determined and square than ever. He knitted his brows into an ugly frown. "By God!" he cried, bringing down his fist on the table, "she shall see me, and that mighty quick, too."

He angrily gulped down a cup of coffee and turned to his other letters. To his profound disgust he realised that he would be occupied with urgent official business during the rest of the day. A new engine

had just been completed at Mayence, and the War Office at Berlin requested him to test its powers without delay. Another expert and several officers of high rank were awaiting him there at that moment.

His forehead was still wrinkled into a frown as he sped on towards Mayence, the cigar stuck out of his mouth at an aggressive angle. For the first time on such an errand he found his thoughts straying from the work he had on hand. Men said his nerves were of chilled steel, yet at the bare thought of losing Rhona he was gripped by a sickening fear. With a big effort Logan put the English girl out of his mind. He resigned the driving wheel to his companion, and drawing out his pocket-book was soon deep in the profoundest problems of his craft.

They sped over the bridge of boats and through the streets of the ancient German city to a workshop niched in the fortifications. A small party of officers and experts had collected round the engine. It was a German's attempt to improve on a French model. Logan had much more faith in French workmanship, and wanted an engine direct from France. "You are sacrificing your country to your patriotism," he told the Berlin people. Now here was the home-made engine before him.

"It's no good to me as it stands," he declared, almost at the first glance.

The inventor, a Pole from East Prussia, named Simborski, who was present, was naturally furious, and was backed up by most of the military men.

"You seem to think that nothing good can be made outside France," grumbled a veteran general.

Logan calmly pointed out what he considered the defects of the engine to the maker, who obstinately

refused to admit them. The American grew impatient. He wanted to get back to Wiesbaden.

"Very well," he said. "I can't stay wrangling here all day. I'll test it myself."

"You can't test it on a day like this," objected Simborski. "It's blowing half a gale."

"If your engine won't stand a puff of wind it's no use to me or the Kaiser. Now, who will give me some lunch?"

The Commandant of the Garrison took the American's arm, and they walked towards the Officers' Club.

"In point of fact," explained Logan, "the engine can easily be put right, but the inventor won't be persuaded of its defects till he sees me come a smash."

"And you propose to come a—what is it?—a smash to convince him?" asked the commandant, smiling.

Logan laughed. "That is certainly not my intention; but that is what will most probably happen. Luckily you have two broad rivers handy. I can swim."

They lunched at the club at a table to themselves. Logan liked this soft-spoken, courteous Prussian general, who was said to have planned the destruction of a dozen Boxer bands in China with the quiet precision of the scientific theorist. The general liked the airman, as all men of action did. He spoke English with a very slight accent. He began now to talk of the United States, which he had often visited.

"That is where you learnt English, I suppose?" queried Logan.

"No, my friend, I had not that advantage. I may be said to have learnt it in London; where I was *attaché* for a couple of years. At that time we were not very popular in London, and the less we heard and the less we understood the better we

seemed to get on. It was just after that unpleasant Melrose incident." The General looked narrowly at the man opposite him.

"What Melrose incident?" asked Logan, colouring boylike at the unexpected utterance of the well-loved name.

The General looked surprised. "Surely you know," he said. "I refer to the father of the lady in whose company I saw you yesterday at Biebrich."

Had Logan not been taken by surprise he might have hesitated to probe into a matter which Rhona had not thought fit to reveal to him. But his interest in her overmastered him.

"I don't know anything about her father's history, but I guess that as you have told me so much you had better go on, General. I am not a very tactful person, and the more I know about my friends' affairs the less likely I shall be to make what you call a *gaffe*."

The Commandant passed his cigar-case to Logan, selected and lit a cigar himself, and considered the ceiling. "Well, perhaps you are right. I feel very much ashamed at having unwittingly betrayed the young lady's family secrets, but it will be better for her for you to hear them from me than from the ordinary and incorrect sources. Her father, Captain Melrose, was, thirteen years ago, one of the most promising artillery officers in the British Army. He was of the scientific, painstaking type, that is, they say, less common over there than among us. One day he was arrested and charged with having sold Government secrets to a foreign Power."

"That means you, I guess?" queried Logan.

"Well, at this distance of time I think we may assume they did mean us. I admit that it was very unpleasant for my predecessor, Von Themar. What

followed was still more unpleasant. To the extreme surprise of our Embassy, Melrose was found guilty, and sentenced to be stripped of his rank and to a long term of imprisonment. When he was brought out into the barrack yard he protested his innocence and declared before God that he had put his country before every other consideration. As they broke his sword in front of him he reeled and dropped down dead from heart failure."

The General paused at this dramatic point in his narrative.

"And was he innocent?" asked Logan eagerly.

"Yes," affirmed the general in a grave tone.

"Why didn't you tell that to the British Government?"

"My dear fellow! Do you think we, of all people, would have been believed? Public opinion was highly incensed against us at that time. There were incidents—stones thrown through the windows of our Embassy, invitations cancelled, and so forth. Any expression of interest on our part would only have sealed the unfortunate man's doom. Besides, Von Themar could only have cleared Melrose by denouncing the real culprit."

"Well, why didn't he?"

The Commandant smiled at his friend's simplicity.

"We could hardly come forward and admit that we had been buying British Government secrets from a British officer. That would have scarcely promoted friendly relations between the two Powers. Moreover, we could not possibly betray the man who had placed himself in our power. I am not sure really that we even know who he was. These matters are generally arranged through intermediaries and the correspondence carried on under fictitious names. I honestly

believe that all Von Themar could be sure of was that Melrose was not the man."

"It seems to me a very shady game that your European Governments play," was Logan's scornful comment.

"I have often regretted the necessity for the existence of the Secret Service, I confess," said the General, "but it is imposed on us by the action of the other Powers."

"So you mean to say that nothing was done at the time or has been done since to clear this innocent man's reputation?" asked the airman heatedly.

"Something was done at the time, in very high circles indeed, I am told; but the facts looked very black against Melrose. They say that Queen Victoria was very much distressed about it. Melrose was a very capable officer. He had served with distinction in India and South Africa, and had the D.S.O. His wife died, of a broken heart they said, six weeks after the catastrophe. The daughter you know. She was pointed out to me by the British Vice-Consul at Frankfort last year."

"I think your Government ought to give her a liberal pension," said Logan savagely.

"Which would encourage people to believe that her father actually had done us a service."

Logan rose from the table and looked angrily out of the window. It seemed to him monstrous, incredible, that the German authorities should have allowed an innocent man to be done to death rather than betray the real offender. He felt an immense pity and tenderness for Rhona. Now he understood her remark, "My country has done little enough for me, or rather it has done too much." Yet he knew that she loved England all the same.

The General watched him with sympathetic interest. "It's a sad story," he reflected, "but it is all over now. Everyone has forgotten it. The best thing Miss Melrose can do is to marry a German—or an American," he put in slyly, "and let the past bury its dead."

Logan, standing up, contemplated the commandant gloomily. "Von Themar is alive still, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, but I fancy he is at the Embassy at St. Petersburg."

"What do you think of the chances of establishing Melrose's innocence?"

"They would be very poor. The British Government would not be more willing than ours, I suppose, to own itself in the wrong. And all the papers must have been destroyed by this time. I wish you luck if you are going to make the attempt. It is a thing, after all, that might happen to any military man. But don't spoil poor Melrose's chances by getting killed this afternoon."

The General glanced at the clock, rose, and buckled on his sword. Logan, viciously chewing the end of his cigar, followed him past saluting groups of officers to the car which awaited them at the door of the club. They drove to the parade-ground outside the fortifications, where his audience of the morning had reassembled. The engine was attached to a biplane of a type with which Logan was familiar. He considered it doubtfully. "You won't make the alterations I suggested?" he asked the inventor.

"I tell you that they are quite unnecessary. You may understand designing, Herr Logan, but you do not understand motor engines. I have made them all my life. I stake my reputation on this one." And Simborski twisted his ugly Polish-looking face into a scowl.

"Well, don't blame me if it breaks down."

"If you will not risk it yourself, I am prepared to make the ascent," sneered the engineer, "but not," he added immediately, "in this wind."

Without more ado Logan sprang into his seat.

After several abortive hops and runs the machine rose into the air. Logan shot upwards to a height of two or three hundred feet and steered towards the river. The biplane began to roll and pitch. The engine, as the pilot had feared, failed him. A gust of wind caught the machine and the engine stopped altogether. Logan glanced down and saw the Main beneath him. He tried a volplane to the nearer bank, but another gust caught the biplane and turned it upside down.

Logan was swung out of his seat. He clung with one hand to what was now the lower plane, and when he was within about fifteen feet of the river jumped clear. He sank immediately and rose a minute later close to the paddle of a passing steamer. He was hauled aboard, and presently landed opposite one of the big hotels on the river front. The machine was rescued by a barge.

Logan discarded his soaking garments and arrayed himself in a dressing-gown provided by the excited hotel proprietor. He was busy with pencil and paper when the officers who had followed his erratic movements as well as they were able burst in upon him.

"I'm feeling fine," he assured the General. "That dip has freshened me up quite a lot. See here, Simborski, we can fix up that engine like this." He tapped the paper before him.

"Sir," hissed the inventor, "you smashed that machine on purpose. You wish to ruin me."

"I'll talk to you when you're able to control yourself," said Logan, and, turning to an engineer officer, he proceeded to point out the defects of the engine as

revealed during the brief flight, and to scheme how they could be remedied. Interrupting himself, he looked from one officer to another : "Can you fellows fix me up a suit of clothes between you ? I want to get back to Wiesbaden at once."

It took some time to fit him, but a composite costume was at last devised. Night had fallen when he took his departure.

" My compliments to Miss Melrose, and good luck in your endeavour," the General whispered in a low tone as they shook hands.

He raced back to the beautiful watering-place with a total disregard for all speed limits. He had made up his mind to see Rhona that day.

But he could hardly appear before her in other people's clothes, however great his eagerness, so he made a halt at his hotel. The clerk in the vestibule congratulated him on his escape. " That's all right," said the airman coolly. " There was no danger. How did you hear of it ? "

" It came through on the tape about an hour ago. It's all over the town by this time."

" You don't say ! " Logan mounted to his room, marvelling why in the world these Germans should care to hear whether he had fallen into the river or not. He dressed with frantic haste, dining on a cup of coffee and some biscuits as he did so. As he left the room a stupid-looking page boy handed him a telegram. He tore it open. It read, " Logan safe—Simborski's engine likely to be rejected—Simborski angry."

" What the blazes do I care ! " exclaimed Logan.

Completely mystified, he read the telegram over again. It had evidently been handed to him by mistake. He glanced at the envelope. It was addressed to Eduard Dermbach, Four Seasons Hotel, Wiesbaden.

CHAPTER V

RHONA, fully dressed, lay stretched on her bed, staring with dull, dry eyes up at the ceiling. Her face was white and drawn. Her hands twisted a newspaper convulsively, as she turned restlessly from side to side. She tossed as if a spasm of pain had passed through her and a sigh escaped her.

She was tortured with anxiety, though at moments she told herself that it was certainty—certainty of Logan's death. Her whole being seemed to ache. She wondered, quite dispassionately, why she should feel like this, what difference the death of this man could make to her. He had only set foot in her home once. They had only been three times together. If he was dead, he would have come and gone out of her life without having affected a single one of her habits or in any way disturbing the course of her life. She told herself that she could not possibly feel any grief for him. Then she heard a low moan. It seemed to come from herself.

“If you were here, my darling,” she murmured, “I would go to the end of the world with you. There is nothing you could ask that I would not grant. . . . Oh, why did I send you away ! ”

Then she pictured him lying, a thing all bandaged and bloodstained, in a hospital ward . . . perhaps the screen drawn round the bed. . . .

She bounded off the bed, and held her hands to her brow. “Serious accident to Logan at Mayence.”

That was all the evening paper said. "I can't stand it," she whispered to herself. "I must find out. What shall I do? I must telephone."

But she knew no one in Mayence. No matter—she would ring up the exchange there, representing herself as a friend of Logan. They might tell her that he was dead. That would be better than this suspense.

With unsteady fingers she pinned on her hat and walked to the door. She opened it, and Logan, very long and erect in his dustcoat, stood before her.

She fell back against the wall and burst out laughing.

"I thought you were smashed up," she gasped.

"I guess not. Who told you that yarn?"

"Here it is in this evening paper."

"Well, I fell into the river, that's all. I suppose I can come in."

He did not wait for permission, but strode into the little sitting-room and switched on the light. Rhona followed, laughing, rather nervously she felt. She stood still, with her hat on by the fire, looking at him across the table.

"My aunt is out. She has gone to a bridge party. You can't stay long." She looked him up and down with a happy smile. "You must have come up here in a hurry."

"I have come here in a hurry. I want to see you about that ridiculous letter you sent me this morning."

"That's exactly what I told you not to do."

After all he was alive and well. The situation was exactly the same as it had been the night before. She felt her resolution returning to her.

The two looked at each other. Rhona tried hard not to lower her eyes, but, beaten at last, shrugged her shoulders and turned round to the fireplace. Resting

one elbow on the mantelboard, she looked down into the grate and tapped her foot on the curb.

"Look here," said Logan, leaning on the edge of the table behind her, "do you remember that you told me you loved me?"

"Is it fair to remind me of that, Mr. Logan?"

"I think it is. Very much fairer than to put the cup to my lips, and then dash it away."

"Well, you were not sorry for the taste, were you?"

"Sorry? No, I was not. But this is fooling. We love each other. Why on earth shouldn't we?"

"If you thought," rapped out Rhona viciously, "that the sight of you would make me forget myself, as I did yesterday, you were mistaken. I am not going to give way again——" She stamped her foot angrily.

"I don't want you to give way. I want you to state your reasons for rejecting my love. I will not go till you do."

"I told you the reason last night, and there are others."

"Well, let us have them."

Rhona refused to look at him. "If I tell you, will you go away?"

"No."

"If you consider them fair?"

"I might."

"Very well, I will give you my reasons." She turned her back to the grate and looked fixedly above his head.

"I have three reasons. The first—I don't say the most important—is the existence of that woman."

"You think it possible she may have been my wife, and may turn up again some day?"

"That is possible. But it isn't quite that. I don't know that the legal aspect of the case concerns me much. I suppose by this time you would be considered

divorced. Perhaps not in England, but you are an American and I live in Germany, so I don't think that the English law matters. But, wife or not, this woman may have been a great deal to you in the past. If I married you—by the way, you have not yet asked me to—I should be haunted by the fear that one day you would see this woman, and that at the sight of her all your old love for her would revive. In all the cases of lost memory recovered that I have read of it happens like that. At the sight of a face the past, with all its emotions, springs to life again, and the present withers away."

Rhona was frightened by the picture she had herself drawn. There was something like a sob in her voice as she concluded, and she turned her face away from him.

"It's true, isn't it?" she asked in a low voice.

Logan moved uneasily. Never had the ghosts buried at Palmiste leered at him so threateningly.

"There are some big 'if's' in your first proposition," he said, with a harsh laugh. "But let us get on to the second."

"Oh, what is the use of going on?" cried Rhona, putting her hand to her forehead. "If there are two people in the world clearly not for each other they are you and I."

If he had kissed her she would have fallen into his arm there and then, but he preferred to probe further into her attitude towards himself.

"Please go on!"

"My second reason, then, is that you are an enemy of my country. I know what you will say—that you are working for Germany as an artist, as a craftsman; but I should know that you went straight from me to design a weapon which in reality is intended to be

used against my countrymen. But, no ; it's not that —it is that I should have to share secrets which I ought not to share. I ought to be doing my best to discover them, instead of being practically your accomplice."

Logan raised his eyebrows in a movement of surprise. "I reserve my defence," he said ; "I understand there is a third reason."

Rhona turned to the mirror and began to draw the pins out of her big hat.

"My third reason," she resumed very deliberately, "may sound odd to you after what I have just said. You see that portrait above my head. That is my father. He was an officer in the English artillery. No man served his country better. When I was eight years old they suspected him of having sold secrets to a foreign power, and they found him guilty. They declared my father to be a traitor. They took him out to degrade him, and they killed him. He fell dead before they could degrade him."

Her voice seemed to break. Logan had listened with bowed head.

"I know all this," he said.

"You knew all this !" Rhona looked at him sharply. "I see You heard it even in America." She laughed a dry, harsh laugh. "Or perhaps someone pointed me out to you as the traitor's daughter. Quite a picturesque title, isn't it ? Perhaps that's why you thought I was a safe person to confide in. Of course, you wouldn't suspect *me* of any feeling for my country."

He raised his head to speak, but with an angry gesture she went on :

"Well, you see, my father was innocent. I know that. They murdered him—the British Government, the Government that could have saved him, but didn't ; the wretch, whoever he was, for whose crime he suffered,

And I am going to prove his innocence: That is my life's work. As soon as I understood what had happened I vowed that. I have added another vow since—never to take another's name till I have cleared my own. When I think of my father lying in his grave all these years with that foul charge unrefuted, I have nothing but reproaches for myself. I cannot give my heart to any man till my work is accomplished. This is no new resolution. It was arrived at long ago. Now you know why I was angry with myself for having yielded to that impulse yesterday."

She flushed slightly as she alluded to the episode of the preceding night, but she was speaking very calmly now. She laid her hat on the table and stood stroking the long, curling feathers without looking at the man.

" You know that I am quite right," she said. " What would you think of me if I were to forget my duty to my dead father and go on living peacefully, contentedly ? There may be some girls who can do that. I am not one of them. I always wonder how the relatives of the people they execute can take it so quietly. I must forgive, I suppose, the men who called themselves his judges"—her voice was filled with scorn—" they were mere fools. But the man who let him suffer—the real culprit—I feel he is still alive. I will hunt him down, if I spend every year of my life in doing it. He is a traitor, and he deserves to die."

A sharp, crackling sound, as of musketry, came as an ominously appropriate accompaniment to her words. It seemed to shatter the stillness of the little room, then left all more silent than before.

" The fireworks," said the girl abstractedly. " There is a fete at the Kurhaus to-night."

Logan found words at last. " And yet," he said, wondering, " after all this, you are concerned for your

country's interest. I do not understand. What, as you said the other day, has your country done for you?"

Rhona turned with a gesture of despair away from him.

"I could never make you understand," she said wearily. "You have told me that to you all this means nothing. One country is the same as another to you. All my ancestors have been soldiers. This sort of thing is in my blood. I dare say it seems archaic and theatrical to you. It's a professional instinct. I can't cast off my country at will. Oh, that's what stings, Maurice"—the name slipped out as she leant her forehead on her hand—"that you should think—that anyone should think—that I am what they took my father for! Don't you understand"—she turned on him passionately—"I can't afford to be indifferent to England's interests? The least sign of any tepidity on my part would lend colour to the imputations against my father. I don't always feel like that, I admit. There are moments when I hate my country. But my father loved it to the last." She glanced up at his portrait. "He would have me speak as I have spoken to-night."

She ceased and looked at him appealingly. He sat pondering what she had said.

"And because a scoundrel and a stupid Government ruined your father," he said bitterly, "you propose to thrust me out of your life?"

"I can do nothing else. I told you we were not for each other. You have no past. I have no future."

He roused himself.

"This is fooling. I have three reasons why you should become my wife. The first is—you love me; the second is—I love you; the third is—I am going to marry you."

She shook her head. Then, coming to him, she took his hand and looked at him wistfully.

"Maurice, Maurice," she entreated. "Don't make me give way. It's true I love you—oh, so much, dear!—but I can't, I daren't yield. Find a way out if you can, but I can't give way."

He drew her towards him and placed his hands on her shoulders.

"I'll find a way, little girl, never fear. You have been real clever in fixing up barriers between us, but I guess I can fly over them. Now let me think."

She waited, looking into his face as if she would read her fate there.

"As to the woman—the woman of the photograph," he said at length. "We must leave her to chance. We can't wreck our lives on a mere hypothesis. She may have been all in all to me—I grant that. She may—it is at least as probable—have been nothing. I may see her again, as you fear—the chances are a million to one that I never shall. If you love me you will take that risk at least. If she comes to life again I am more likely to hate her than to love her. . . . To think I should love her more than you."

He leaned forward and kissed her on the lips.

"Say that you would take that chance—that whatever else may, that spectre shall not divide us. Other women have risked as much. Will you pass that barrier if I can get over the others?"

"You tore her photograph in pieces," reflected Rhona; then, looking at him keenly, she questioned: "You don't think her beautiful, do you?"

He smiled. "No, I don't. She is not the type that I admire. If I know anything of that type of woman, it may console you to know that she probably looks old enough to be my mother by this time, assuming

that the photograph was taken twelve years ago. It sounds a brutal reflection, but it may do you some good."

"Yes, it is rather brutal, but there is something in it," Rhona admitted. She took Logan's hands from her shoulders and stood upright before him.

"I will concede this," she said, "that I won't let that reason count if you can answer the others. I am afraid I am treating you rather like the wicked princess treated her suitors in the fairy tale."

"Well, I reckon the battle as won," cried Logan exultantly. "Now as to my being an enemy of your country. Of course I'm not, but I won't argue the point. You say that your conscience troubles you—that in keeping my secrets you are acting as my accomplice. Very well, I release you from your promise. Tell your Government what you have seen. Try to find out something more. I shall fight you all I know. Trick me into disclosures, shoot at me as a spy did the other night. I guess I shan't mind. You fight for your own country and I'll love you for it. I fight for the hand that pays me—which for the time being is that of the Kaiser. Next year it may be George the Fifth's—assuming that your people will ever wake up to the possibilities of aerial warfare. But go ahead. Do your worst. We will love across the lines."

Rhona's eyes glowed. "That would be delightful," she burst out. "You mean what you say, Maurice? You wouldn't get mad if I tricked you out of a State secret."

"I wouldn't get mad. But you won't. You won't find out much, Miss Rhona Melrose. I reckon we are in for a very interesting game. But take care you don't get caught by the authorities. Don't reckon on me to get you out of their clutches a second time."

He paused as if considering the chances of this extraordinary warfare which was to be the condition of their love.

"Yes," he repeated, "it will be a great game while it lasts. But it won't be very long. This will probably be the last piece of work that I'll do for the Kaiser. For I have another game on hand."

He looked at her with a quiet smile.

"I'm going to vindicate your father, Rhona," he said. "I had made up my mind to do that before I entered this room. You're right. He was a foully injured man. Well, I guess I'll clear him. I struck a trail to-day that will lead me right there, I guess. How does that proposition strike you?"

The girl's lips parted. She gazed at him with sparkling eyes.

"You will do this?"

"Sure," came the confident reply. "I guess it's a business that I can handle more easily than you. And I generally succeed in what I undertake."

"If you do this——" Her face lit up.

He made a gesture of dissent. "I don't ask any price for clearing the reputation of a dead man. I am not out for a bargain. It's enough for me to know that we love each other and that I am bridging the gulfs which you fancy lie between us. Marry me to-morrow or marry me when my task is accomplished. Perhaps you aren't sure that you do love me."

Their eyes met.

"Kiss me," she said. "You know."

His arm was round her and his lips were pressed to hers. For a minute they stood thus clasped. Then she broke away from him, half laughing, half crying.

"And I might have driven you away altogether," she faltered.

"You were never near that," he assured her, that queer, resolute look in his eyes. He stretched his arm towards her, when his ear caught the sound of a key turning in the lock of the outer door.

"My aunt returning," cried Rhona. "Well—quickly then—yes, again."

Miss Netherby's voice was heard outside.

"Come in, Herr Dermbach. The passage is rather dark."

CHAPTER VI

RHONA took up a discreet attitude by the fireplace, ostentatiously smoking a cigarette which she had forgotten to light. She raised her eyebrows and looked at Logan as if to say, "Who's this?" His eyes were turned towards the door. He also was curious to see the man who was kept so well informed as to his movements.

Miss Netherby entered, removing a fleecy shawl from her pretty grey hair. She gave a little gasp of surprise on finding that her niece was not alone.

"This is Mr. Logan," explained Rhona. "My aunt, Miss Netherby.

Logan bowed very obviously and ceremoniously, as was his wont. It seemed to him that the man behind Miss Netherby had started on hearing his name, and was now regarding him curiously.

"How very delightful to meet you, Mr. Logan," cried the English lady effusively. "They were saying at the Wencksterns', where I have just been, that you had been smashed up. But I knew that to be nonsense. You airmen have nine lives. Didn't I say that to you, Herr Dermbach, as we came along? Oh, let me introduce you. Herr Dermbach—Mr. Logan."

The two men shook hands. Herr Dermbach was a man of somewhat remarkable appearance. He was about Logan's own height, but, owing to a stoop, did not look nearly so tall. It was difficult to estimate his

age, for his features were obscured by a preposterously heavy moustache and a pair of dark blue glasses. As he came forward into the room the light showed up a long brown scar reaching across his temple—the result, apparently, of a severe burn, which had extirpated his left eyebrow. He wore evening dress beneath his light summer overcoat. Logan noticed that he limped badly and had to support himself by a stick.

"You have not introduced me, aunt," Rhona reminded Miss Netherby.

"How silly of me! Herr Dermbach saw me home from the Wencksterns'. I won the first prize and he took the booby prize, so of course we paired off together. This is my niece, Herr Dermbach. She speaks German ever so much better than I do. I really can't speak your beautiful language any more this evening. I shan't sleep if I do."

"Do you speak English?" asked Rhona of the newcomer in that language.

He replied in German, "I understand it perfectly, Fräulein, but I do not speak it easily—especially in the presence of English people. But pray continue to speak your own language—it is very pleasant for me to hear."

"Now, that's very nice of you, Herr Dermbach," said Miss Netherby, "you shall have a whisky-and-soda, which is the best way to give you an English accent—"

"Or a Scotch one," interjected her niece.

"Mr. Logan shall have one, too. Perhaps you would rather have it neat. You must have drunk enough water to-day. Sit down, both of you."

Rhona busied herself looking for the whisky, which had not been used for some months. The two men surveyed each other from opposite ends of the room.

"That was a nasty spill you had to-day, Herr Logan," began the German in his own language.

"Not so bad as some people imagined," replied the airmen, fixing his gaze steadily on the blue glasses.

The hospitable Miss Netherby looked from one to the other of her guests, evidently well pleased with both.

"I must thank you for your kindness to my niece," she said to Logan. "She was lucky to fall in with you. One would expect you flying men to be 'riding the gathering blast' during thunderstorms, rather than scurrying along the road in motor-cars."

"The last time, Miss Netherby, that I tried 'riding the gathering blast' in a storm I was found with my head firmly wedged in a briar bush and my legs beating a tattoo in the air, while the aeroplane was gently fluttering around uncertain whether to alight on my feet or on the horns of an extremely interested and irascible bull."

"Fancy! How very disagreeable! Still flying must be a delightful art. The uncertainty where you are going to land—but I suppose you don't appreciate that. Are you going to give us any exhibition of your skill here? But I suppose you are too busy. You are doing something for the Imperial Government, are you not?"

"Yes, madam, I am making certain trials for the War Office."

"Well," said Miss Netherby, "I hope you don't propose to blow up the Tower of London, or drop bombs and things into Hyde Park. I am a good patriot."

Herr Dermbach smiled, as if amused by the lady's sentiments.

"Germany is very fortunate in having secured Mr. Logan's services," he remarked politely. "England will have to look out."

Rhona now withdrew her head and shoulders from the interior of the sideboard, in which after a prolonged search she had discovered the whisky. She placed it on the table beside a syphon and three glasses.

"You are both very horrible people," declared Miss Netherby, "and I really ought not to have you here at all. I insist upon you both drinking the health of King George."

"Well," demurred Logan, "In America we don't freeze on to kings exactly; still—suppose we drink good luck to England."

"I'm sure I've no objection either," said Herr Dermbach with alacrity.

Logan was about to fill his glass when Rhona anticipated him. Raising it to the light, as if to see how high the soda had mounted, she touched the brim ever so lightly with her lips and passed it to him. The two men drank the toast standing. Logan tilted his glass as he did so in the direction of Rhona. She smiled, frowned, and shook her head reprovingly. Odd, he thought, how the least little attention from her could speed the blood through his pulse at racing pace.

"Now, as you've been so nice about this," said Miss Netherby, much gratified, "we will drink success to Germany, too."

This time she mixed herself a very weak solution of whisky. Her niece, not to be left out of the festivities, lit the cigarette which had been projecting at various rakish angles from her lips for the last ten minutes.

They raised their glasses. Before it reached his mouth the German set his down again abruptly, spilling a few drops on the floor. He was staring at the portrait of Rhona's father above the fireplace.

"What's the matter?" asked Logan, watching him narrowly. "You seem unwell, sir."

And, in fact, Herr Dermbach had turned very pale.
"A passing spasm, that is all."

He drank the whisky at a gulp and sat down again. He still kept his eyes fixed on the portrait.

Both Rhona and her aunt manifested their concern. "Yet it is the best whisky," asserted Miss Netherby defensively.

"In point of fact," said Herr Dermbach, who seemed to have recovered his composure, "I was startled by the resemblance of that portrait yonder to someone I used to know."

"That is the portrait of my father," said Rhona—"Captain Melrose."

For a moment the German sat in silence, staring at the girl with what seemed to her extraordinary interest.

"So!" he said, "you are the daughter of Captain Melrose."

"Yes. Did you know him?"

"Yes. I knew your father, Miss Melrose."

The man said this almost defiantly. There was a silence. It was the first time for many years that Rhona had heard anyone claim her father's acquaintance. She glanced, moved by some impulse, at the dead man's portrait. The visitor followed the direction of her glance and looked away.

He seemed to be labouring under considerable emotion.

"Only very slightly I knew him. Yet I may say that we were friends—once. I do not suppose that he ever spoke of me to his family. I was some years younger than he. I am very pleased to meet his daughter."

Another long pause. Logan felt very much *de trop*, but could find no pretext for withdrawing. Moreover, in view of his recent resolution, he was bound to take

an interest in all that concerned the late Captain Melrose. His eyes, like the two ladies', were riveted on the man with the blue glasses. Miss Netherby coughed rather nervously, "How strange we should have met this evening, Herr Dermbach," she said. "I had no idea that you were an old friend. When did you meet my brother-in-law?"

Dermbach perceptibly hesitated. "Over here in Germany, during his travels."

Miss Netherby looked at the carpet. "Yes, he often visited Germany," she said meditatively.

Logan guessed that this was a circumstance which had told against the captain in the eyes of his countrymen when the charge was brought.

Rhona, whose colour had momentarily deserted her, now recovered her self-command. "I am delighted to meet a friend of my father's," she said, and held out her hand to the German.

He took it limply, and let his gaze travel round the room. It took in a dozen indications of English taste and traditions.

"Have you been living over here very long?" he asked.

"We have been living about three years on and off at Wiesbaden," Miss Netherby informed him. "But my niece is studying at Frankfort, at the Conservatoire, so, of course, we have to spend part of the year there."

"When your studies are finished, Miss Melrose, no doubt you look forward to returning to England."

"I may never return to England, Herr Dermbach."

"Ah, quite so! I see you like this country very much."

"I have got used to Germany," replied Rhona, throwing her cigarette, half-smoked, into the grate. "There are many things I like in your country, and

I have made some good friends here. Of course, it's not quite the same as one's own country."

It struck the observant Logan that Dermbach was rather relieved than mortified by this last remark. He was, therefore, quite unprepared for a patriotic outburst on his part.

"Of course not, of course not. One's country remains one's country, when all is said and done. That's the way an Englishman always feels—and we Germans too. My country, right or wrong, I always say. That is why I feel so grateful to our friend here."

Logan looked at him with no answering smile. "What makes you say that?" he asked.

"Well, it will be thanks to you that Germany will secure the empire of the air."

Dermbach glanced from one woman to the other to see how they took this remark. Rhona bit her lip and shrugged her shoulders, ever so slightly. Miss Netherby raised her finely-pencilled eyebrows and seemed to wait for Logan's reply.

"I guess you know quite a little about it," said the airman, rather rudely. "Your Government has commissioned me to do certain work, but it's not quite so far-reaching as you imagine."

"You had better restrain your gratitude, Herr Dermbach," said Miss Netherby. "Pride you know comes before a fall, and when you fall from an aeroplane you don't get up again very quickly."

But the German did not seem at all displeased. "Well," he said, cheerfully, "gratitude is a sense of obligation for favours expected, so it may not have been wasted on Mr. Logan. At any rate, England will have to bestir herself if she does not want to yield the command of the air to us."

"France has got it already," snapped Logan.

He longed to box the German's ears. He was intensely irritated by the turn the conversation had taken. It ranged him and Rhona in opposite camps, and was calculated to revive all the scruples he had been at such pains to dispel. The girl was pacing to and fro before the fireplace, her hands behind her back, her graceful figure bent forward. She was evidently thinking deeply.

"You seem very anxious on behalf of England," she said, looking coldly at the German.

"Anxious—no." He looked searchingly at Rhona. "It is you English who should be anxious." He laughed pleasantly. "After all, we are all friends of Mr. Logan, and, like me, you must wish success to all his undertakings."

Rhona turned quickly away, picked up her hat, and carried it into her bedroom. Logan, as she passed him, tried in vain to intercept her glance.

"My dear sir," he said icily, addressing Dermbach, "the success of my undertakings will not be affected by anybody's wishes, and Miss Melrose's are no doubt confined to the success of her own country, whatever my plans may be. As for me, I take no stock in your petty European rivalries. You all seem mighty skeered of each other, and that enables a good many practical men like me to make a good living out of you."

The airman rose to go. There was no chance of further talk with Rhona.

He offered his excuses to his hostess. "Well, goodbye, Miss Netherby. Don't let our friend here persuade you that I'm an enemy of your country or imagine that I am going to throw squibs down your chimneys. Rhona will tell you that I'm quite neutral."

The name slipped out unawares. Miss Netherby

gave no sign that she had noticed it. "I shall be very glad to see you both again," she said, "if either of you have the time to waste on two lonely females, as my dear mother would have put it."

She turned to Dermbach. "I shall enjoy talking to you about poor Archie"—she glanced up at the dead man's portrait. "Perhaps you knew my sister, too?"

"I have heard the captain speak of her," replied the German, in what sounded to Logan a voice under painful control. He turned abruptly towards the airman. "We both go the same way, I think. I also live at the Four Seasons. Your room, in fact, is next to mine. Here is Miss Melrose. *Auf wiedersehen, Fräulein.*"

The man in blue glasses bent low over Rhona's hand and kissed it with more grace than she had expected of a German. Logan promptly followed his example, and so thoroughly that the girl had to withdraw her hand sharply. She escorted them to the door.

"Good-night! Come again soon, both of you," she called out as they reached the third or fourth stair.

Logan turned and rushed back, muttering that he had left something behind. He found it, apparently, immediately behind the door which Rhona held ajar between them and the stairs. In the excitement of the search he even let fall his hat and cane. When he rejoined his waiting companion he wore a flower rather clumsily thrust through his buttonhole.

Rhona re-entered the sitting-room with a heightened colour. "It never rains but it pours," remarked Miss Netherby. "First your American, then my German. By the way, are you engaged to Mr. Logan?"

"What makes you ask that, aunt?"

"Well, I saw him kiss you three times behind the door, and I fancy you kissed him. From where I am sitting you can see everything happening in the passage in that mirror."

The girl made a tremendous effort to imitate her aunt's casual manner, and then burst into a fit of nervous laughter.

"Maurice and I are very fond of each other," she explained.

"Well, of course I didn't suppose you were kissing him for practice. Apparently you have no announcement to make."

"He wants me to marry him, but I won't till father's memory is cleared. He promises to do that."

"But how can he? What does he know about the case?" asked Miss Netherby, roused out of her studied calm.

"If he resolves to do a thing he always does it," maintained Rhona, proudly.

Her aunt looked uneasy. "You know that he is working for the Imperial Government—against England, that German suggested. He seems a doubtful sort of ally." She sighed. "I must say I'm sorry you met him and have got mixed up in his affairs. And now all that dreadful business is to be reopened."

Rhona kissed her. "Good-night, auntie!" she said. "When you think it over you will admit that I have acted rightly. Whatever happens father's innocence must be proclaimed before all the world."

CHAPTER VII

LOGAN and Herr Dermbach walked at a leisurely pace up the broad Wilhelmstrasse. The German assumed an apologetic tone. "I am afraid," he said, "that I was a little indiscreet talking as I did about your services to the Fatherland before our English friends. But I suspect that their sympathies are more with you than with their own country."

It seemed to Logan that there was a question in this last remark, as in most of his companion's previous utterances. "Well, I guess you are wrong," was all the reply the airman vouchsafed.

"Ah!" said Dermbach, "in spite of—" He broke off, and then went on. "In spite of their long residence in this country."

Logan lit a cigar and handed one to the German. Lured by the beauty of the night and the fragrance of the trees, they turned into the Kurhaus Gardens. For a few minutes they smoked in silence. Logan was interested in Herr Dermbach. He was not yet sure whether he liked or disliked him—a state of uncertainty sufficiently rare with him. He liked him for not disclosing Captain Melrose's story, of which those opening words "In spite of—" showed him clearly to be cognisant. On the other hand, there was something furtive and disingenuous about the man.

"Why do you take such interest in my movements Herr Dermbach?" Logan suddenly inquired.

"As a patriotic German I cannot help being interested in them."

"But your patriotic fervour need not carry you the length of having my movements reported to you wherever I go," said the airman, producing the telegram from his pocket.

Dermbach read it without any signs of confusion or embarrassment. He looked at the American. "Delivered to you by mistake, I suppose?"

"Yes. Perhaps you will explain it."

"The explanation is simple. I am a journalist."

"On what journal?"

"I am not at liberty to tell."

Logan puffed at his cigar for a few seconds, a light half-angry, half-humorous in his eyes. "Well," he said, "journalists have to get their living, I suppose, the same as other folks. And I'm bound to say that you don't worry me as much over here as they do in the States. But take my advice, Herr Dermbach, and restrain your professional curiosity. You won't find your authorities as indulgent to the Press as they are in my country."

"I'm sorry if my inquiries have annoyed or inconvenienced you," murmured the German in his own language.

They found the vestibule of the big hotel almost deserted. Logan suggested a cocktail. He was one of those men who go to bed with reluctance, and never so long as there appears to be the least chance of a chat and a smoke. While his companion drew a couple of chairs out on to the terrace, he called a waiter and wrote out a recipe for the preparation of a cocktail of extraordinary excellence. This was to be handed to the bar-tender.

"I had that recipe, sir," he said to Dermbach

impressively, "from Sam Jackson, the cocktail king, of Kansas City. It's what I always take after a smash."

The German drank off the concoction, choked, and congratulated the airman on its virtues.

"It'll make you feel fine," declared Logan. "By the way, meeting Miss Melrose to-night seemed to jar you quite a little?"

He eyed his companion nervously. He wondered if he could throw any light on the dark business of Captain Melrose. "Perhaps," he hazarded, "you were very much attached to her father?"

"It would be untrue to say that, but I was under great obligations to him, and he met with a very sad end, which many people thought undeserved."

This was said very slowly and deliberately.

"Well, you will be glad to hear that I propose to establish Captain Melrose's innocence," announced Logan.

Herr Dermbach gazed straight before him. He sipped his cocktail thoughtfully. "How do you propose to do that?" he asked.

"I have certain information from your people—"

The German started. "From my people?"

Logan laughed. "Not your paper, whatever that may be. The German Government—leastways, I am on the track of that information."

"They will not give you any information—they have none to give." Dermbach spoke scornfully.

"How do you know that?"

"Bah! Why didn't they intervene to save Melrose at the trial? Either they hadn't the will or the power. You have not read the evidence. I don't believe in Melrose's guilt myself, but it is too late to establish his innocence."

The German nipped off the end of a cigar. "Or too early," he added as an afterthought.

"Why too early?"

"Because when all the parties are dead the truth is almost sure to come out."

"And meanwhile Captain Melrose is to go unavenged, and his daughter is to be pointed at as the daughter of a traitor. No, sir!" Logan brought his fist down with a violence that made the table jump.

His companion looked puzzled and irritated. "I can see no purpose in reopening that unhappy business," he said. "Everyone has forgotten it. Miss Melrose may marry, and then no one will connect her with the tragedy. Poor Melrose is dead—so is his wife. You can't do him any good. I don't imagine that those in any way responsible for his ruin are in a very enviable frame of mind. They must be in hell. There are all sorts of people concerned. There were the agents who tempted the traitor. Don't you think they were as guilty as anybody? What do you suppose they feel about it now?"

"Not half as uncomfortable as they will feel when I begin," replied Logan calmly.

"Well, the Government is bound to shield those who acted in its interests. It would be the last infamy to betray them. If it was to be done at all, it should have been at the court-martial, or at least in time to have saved Melrose. They should have spoken then. Now they must remain for ever silent."

"Herr Dermbach," said Logan quietly, voicing a suspicion which had been growing in him since he noticed his companion's agitation, "I guess you were one of those agents."

The German shrugged his shoulders. "I was not. You will probably not believe me, but it is the truth. I

suspect certain persons to have been involved in the case, and I tell you that by stirring up these muddy waters you will splash not only a great many highly-placed persons, but you will injure the fair fame of the dead. Take the advice of one who wishes well to Miss Melrose. Leave it to time and to men's consciences to clear her father. Why raise vain hopes in her? Failure in your attempt would be a public confirmation of the verdict of the court-martial. Was Dreyfus cleared by the second trial at Rennes? "

"No, but he was by the Court of Cassation."

Dermbach shifted in his chair impatiently. "In obedience, probably to political considerations. And look what reputations that agitation blasted, what mischief it occasioned. You will have other Henrys cutting their throats if you go on with this business. But Dreyfus was alive. In his case, all this was worth while. It is beyond the power of man to help or harm Melrose."

"But not his daughter."

"How?" Dermbach looked Logan squarely in the face. "If any man wants to marry her, he will not care about her father's reputation. You would marry her, Mr. Logan, if she were the daughter of Judas Iscariot."

"I guess you see pretty well through those blinkers of yours," laughed Logan. "That's right enough. But," he added doggedly, "I'm going ahead with this business all the same. Those concerned must look out for themselves."

The German smoked for some minutes in silence. "You will fail," he said, firmly. "If the German government could assist you it would not. Our petty European differences may excite your American contempt, Mr. Logan, but they mean a good deal to us over

here. With us the nation is more than the man. Germany dares not betray the men who served her. The Kaiser is a gentleman."

"That's exactly why I rely on him to help me." Logan rose, stretched himself like a tired hound, and yawned. "Well, I guess I'll say good night, Dermbach. But you ought to help me in this business. You are a journalist. You would find this much more exciting than running around, finding out what I had for lunch, and when I last had my hair cut. This may turn out to be a real scoop. Why, our pressmen would be on this thing if the guilty man were their own father."

"I dare say," said Dermbach, acidly. "I have been in America. Our methods are different. I work in the interests of my country. It is not to the interests of anyone, as far as I can see, that this case should be reopened."

"Well, will you help for the sake of Miss Melrose?" persisted Logan.

The German hesitated. "I have told you that I do not see how this can benefit Miss Melrose. Still, I shall always have her interests in mind. I do not invite your confidence, but I may be ready to assist you at times, always in the sense I have indicated. But you will achieve nothing."

"I always succeed," said the airman, carelessly. "Good night," he called from the foot of the stairs, "and don't forget the prescription for the cocktail."

His room commanded a view of the vestibule. As he drew the blind he saw Dermbach still sitting smoking and staring blankly into space.

CHAPTER VIII

Hoot—hoot—ho-o-ot.

Rhona opened her eyes, turned over and went to sleep again.

Hoot—hoo-oo-oot—

The girl sat up abruptly. The sunlight was very pale. It could not be long after dawn. The hooting continued. She sprang out of bed, and peeped from behind the window curtain.

Her heart leaped. She saw Logan in his little grey car circling slowly round the Platz. She flung up the window and flashed a white hand at him. Then hurriedly donning a white kimono, she held the curtains over her shoulders like a mantle, and stepped out on to the tiny balcony.

“ Hullo ! ” she hailed him.

He halted his car beneath her. “ Going to Mayence,” he shouted. “ Shan’t be back for three days.”

He looked splendid she thought—so fresh, so brown, so straight. He was as keen and forceful as the winds with which he battled. This was the lover of whom she had always dreamed. She thought scornfully of the Romeos of the operas.

Her hair tumbled about her cheeks and shoulders. The breeze caught the curtains and revealed for a brief moment the whiteness of her throat. He gazed up at her with love and longing. He did not compare her with Juliet, for he had heard of that luckless heroine

only in the vaguest way. But this English girl, he told himself, was the finest thing he had ever seen on God's earth.

"What do you want to go to Mayence for?" she asked. "I want you here."

"I'm going on the Kaiser's business."

"Bother the Kaiser! Why not on mine?"

"I'll start that soon enough, never fear. Won't you wish me luck?"

A frightened look came into her eyes. "There's no fear of your being smashed up, is there?" she asked. In her excitement she let the curtains fall aside, and leant over the balustrade, clasping the kimono round her. Her hair fell down about her like a golden fountain.

"No, I shan't be smashed up. I must live for you . . . to die for you if need be." They looked long into each other's eyes. "I shall remember you standing there all my life," he said.

This indiscreet admiration at once caused the girl to draw the curtains around her. A servant popped her head out of the window opposite and stared curiously at the lovers.

"You make me feel a very abandoned person," laughed Rhona. "My aunt will turn me out of doors."

"Well, you know your way to the hut in the forest, don't you?"

"Yes, I do, and I should like to blow it up with dynamite." She snapped her fingers at him. "And if you are going on the Kaiser's business, I won't wish you luck—so there!"

"Good-bye, then," cried Logan, gripping the driving wheel. "Is war declared?"

Her voice rang defiantly. "Yes, till you enter my service, it's war!"

She kissed her hand to him and ran back into her room.

She sang as she dressed, till her aunt, who slept on the other side of the passage, expressed her discontent by throwing a slipper at the door. In all her life she never remembered to have felt so happy. It is a rare draught, first love in its first stage, and the English girl drank it to the full. The German land, which had been so far to her at best a homely place of exile, was transfigured into an Eden. The trees she could see waving in the distance had heard their first passionate confession of love ; behind the Neroberg was the spot where they had first met. She would visit it again, that day or the next. The days which had seemed each morning so difficult to fill, might now be sanctified anyone of them by a meeting with him.

Excepting the three now before her. They formed a very unwelcome entr'acte. Still, she could think of him all the time, and live over and over again in memory those delicious moments in the forest. She never recalled them without a blush and a thrill of delight. She knew that they would have power to stir her pulse to her dying day, that they would ever be " the greenest spot in memory's waste."

Like all lovers, she lived in the present. She was in no way troubled by the vagueness of her relations with Maurice or what remark they might create. She despised the silly subterfuge of an " engagement " when she had refused to marry him except upon certain conditions which it might prove beyond his power to bring about. Till these conditions were fulfilled they must be lovers without any formal tie.

Would the conditions be fulfilled ? She paled when she realised how much was at stake—her own happiness, her father's honour. She set her teeth and vowed she

would persevere in her resolution. She believed in her father's innocence, she believed in her lover's ability to overcome all obstacles. "I could not love him if I did not," she told herself. "The labours of Hercules would be nothing to him."

Her aunt did not apparently share this confidence. Her expression betrayed anxiety. Rhona frequently surprised her in profound thought, her cheek supported on her hand, thinking, thinking. The girl at moments reproached herself for having sharply dispelled the elder woman's dream of an autumn, calm and gentle. She knew she was about to force open a sealed door, which might hide as many horrors as Bluebeard's chamber. But this revelation of her niece's real personality, and the passion which had been latent in her, occupied Miss Netherby's thoughts, perplexed and alarmed her, almost more than the proposed re-opening of the case. "After all," she sighed, "I ought to have expected it. It was bound to come some day. Her mother was like that."

Then she wondered how much she had missed by not having been like that, too.

The second day dawned to Rhona's immense relief. This would soon go—being begun it hardly counted, therefore only one day remained between her and him. At breakfast she experienced her first pang of disappointed love. There was no letter from him. It was beastly of him—he might have written. She could not imagine what a love-letter from him would be like. It was as easy to imagine him writing poetry. Perhaps he would telegraph—they were not connected with the telephone.

But the morning passed without any news of him. She wondered how she had passed the time before he had come into her life. At moments she felt

profoundly miserable, and made up her mind that she would never see him again. Perhaps he had realised the seriousness of the obstacles between them, which she had so stupidly dwelt upon. But then he would hardly have come round to say good-bye. That was very sweet of him. So she dreamed of him all the morning and played Tschaikowsky's "Chanson Triste" with his face before her.

After lunch she said she was going for a long walk. She was, in fact, going on a pilgrimage to the spot where they had first met.

Passing through the Kurhaus Gardens she met Herr Dermbach. Her first impression was that he looked very much younger by daylight than by night, her second that his limp was much less conspicuous. He seemed extremely glad to see her.

He inquired very politely about Miss Netherby, and then turned to accompany her in her original direction.

"Mr. Logan is away, I hear," he presently remarked.
"Not for a long time, I hope?"

"He has gone to Mayence, and will be back to-morrow—at least I suppose he won't really be back till the morning after," she said a little ruefully.

She instinctively disliked Dermbach, though she felt that she ought to like him as a friend of her father's. Moreover, she had resented his evident belief in Germany's superiority over England in aerial warfare, and the tactless manner in which he had brought the subject up. Still, Germans were always tactless. It was something that he had not discussed her father's death and wound up by asking what their income was and if they did their washing at home.

Dermbach seemed to read her thoughts, for he said :
"I really must apologise to you, Miss Melrose, for my stupid allusion to international questions the other

night. I see now they were in bad taste. But I saw Mr. Logan was a great friend of yours"—she felt he was watching her face from beneath his glasses—"and it seemed natural to congratulate him on what he was doing for our country. I forgot it was at the expense of yours."

"You don't seem likely to let me forget it," burst out Rhona impatiently. Would she never cease hearing that her lover was the foe of England?

Dermbach looked almost pathetically crestfallen and apologetic. "I am sorry," he murmured humbly. "I am a sad bungler, Miss Melrose. It is naturally painful to you to be so reminded."

They were walking up the Taunusstrasse now, but Herr Dermbach evinced no intention of immediately leaving her. "Perhaps you will be induced to pardon any want of tact on my part," he said, "when I tell you, Miss Melrose, that as a friend of your father, I should very much like you also to regard me as a friend."

Such a request coming from one you don't like is embarrassing. Yet Rhona was touched. "You are very kind, Herr Dermbach," she said awkwardly.

They walked on, she wondering how she could get rid of him. She wanted to be alone to think about Maurice. Yet Herr Dermbach's conversation was not uninteresting. He had travelled far and wide and had much that was fresh to tell about remote countries. He professed great admiration for England. "It's a pity that the two nations can't come to a better understanding," he remarked.

"It is indeed," said Rhona fervently, recalling her declaration of war against her own lover.

"Most people," the German went on, "look on me as a chauvinist. I am nothing of the kind. I expect everyone to stand up for his own country."

Rhona flushed guiltily. "I noticed certainly," she remarked dryly, "that you attached great virtue to patriotism in the abstract. Yet you evidently expected us to endorse your compliments to Mr. Logan."

Herr Dermbach laughed. "Ah, there you remind me of my mistake again. Knowing that you had lived over here so long, I foolishly assumed that your sympathies would be half German by this time." He glanced at her keenly. "For that—and other reasons," he added meditatively.

"What other reasons?" asked the girl, looking straight before her.

Her companion appeared to hesitate. "Well," he said, with a show of embarrassment, "I couldn't help feeling that you had no particular reason to love your country. You must forgive me when I say that, seeing Mr. Logan with you, for a moment I fancied that you had made common cause with him, so to speak."

Rhona quickened her pace. "I hope you see now, Herr Dermbach," she said angrily, "that the suspicion was an insulting one."

The German assumed an expression of abject penitence. "I ask your pardon most humbly. Still, in the sad, the peculiar circumstances, such resentment on your part would have been not only natural but pardonable. But I might have guessed that your father's daughter would have put her country before all other things."

Rhona looked gloomily before her. Somehow this man managed to convey a reproach in every word he uttered. He professed himself a patriotic German, yet he was fast lashing her into reluctant hostility towards his own country. He seemed to be taunting her with her friendship with an ally of Germany. For a moment she wondered whether there could be any

hidden purpose behind these persistent allusions to her attitude towards Logan and her native land. She could find none. He was probably a fanatical chauvinist, and his compliments to her on her own sense of patriotism were simply clumsy attempts to turn the edge of his implied sneers.

They had now reached the open country. They rested by the roadside on a bench between two medlar trees. Rhona drew patterns in the dust with her parasol. She decided to change the subject. "Did you know my father well?" she asked.

"I knew him quite well when he was here in Germany. He made several visits, as you perhaps know. You were very little at the time. You wore your hair loose on your shoulders, and brown stockings and very high brown button boots."

"He seems to have described me to you pretty minutely," laughed Rhona. Somehow these recollections of her childhood seemed to establish a sympathy between her and the German.

"By the way," he said, "I understand from Mr. Logan that you have hopes of re-opening that sad case?"

"Yes. Mr. Logan is very confident of success."

The German shook his head. "I wish you luck, but I am not hopeful. The English Government will not easily be persuaded to own itself in the wrong, and I understand that you have no influence to bring to bear upon them."

"No, unfortunately," admitted Rhona, surveying the letters L. O. which she had traced in the dust. She hastily effaced them.

Then Herr Dermbach said a rather strange thing. "I hope, Miss Melrose, you will not be tempted to barter Mr. Logan's secrets with the English Government in exchange for your father's vindication."

She regarded him stupidly, wondering if he had meant to insult her or Logan. But he continued to gaze pensively at the landscape as though unconscious of offence. He seemed a queer sort of person.

"I only understand you imperfectly, Herr Dermbach," she said searching his countenance. "To begin with I am not in possession of Mr. Logan's secrets; secondly, if I were, I fail to see how I could barter them, as you put it, in exchange for the vindication of my father's honour; and thirdly, I do not know whether you mean to insult me by suggesting I should be capable of such a thing."

The German manifested symptoms of distress. "Insult, you, my dear young lady? What an idea! Why, such a course as I suggested would be most honourable to you. What German would not consider himself bound to betray all secrets affecting the safety of his fatherland, without the additional stimulus of filial piety? No, Miss Melrose, it is most fortunate that you are not in possession of Mr. Logan's secrets, or I should never have let fall so rash a suggestion. The fact is, I let this question of duty to one's country obsess me."

"Yes, I think you do," agreed Rhona, very much nettled. The man's remarks had started a train of thought. She thought, too, that she had fathomed the motive of his inquisitiveness into her sentiments. "I suppose," she ventured with a cold smile, "that you imagined I was cultivating the acquaintance of Mr. Logan in order to get at what you call his secrets?"

He did not seem at all annoyed at this thrust. He laughed pleasantly. "Oh come, Miss Melrose, I certainly never suspected you of playing the Delilah to our Samson! That would be too much. Perhaps I wondered if it was discreet of Mr. Logan, being so

friendly with you, but I am sure I couldn't blame him. But he knows that you are at heart as fanatical a chauvinist as I, and will take good care, I'll be bound, to keep his plans and projects a secret from you."

He looked at her questioningly, notwithstanding. She averted her eyes. Then she rose and extended her hand. "Au revoir, Herr Dermbach," she said. "We must have a long talk some day about my father. And for Heaven's sake, leave this question of our duty to our respective countries alone. Much more of this and I should become a communist."

She gave him no opportunity of offering to accompany her further, but swung briskly down the white road, knowing that his lameness would prevent him following her. Had she looked back, she might have noticed him watching her with a peculiar amused expression. His words had stirred up in her a tumult of conflicting views and emotions. Because she took an interest in Maurice, everyone—first, her aunt, then this man—half suspected her of caring nothing for her country. Nay, Maurice, himself had been surprised to discover that she had any sentiment for England. Then, as soon as he found that he was wrong, this German took it for granted that she would turn her acquaintance with Maurice to the profit of her own country. It seemed a rash suggestion for a German to make, but of course he had no reason to suppose that she was in a position to act upon it. She knitted her brows as she re-considered their conversation. Was the man inciting her to get at her lover's secrets? Maurice had told her that he was regarded with bitter jealousy by a powerful clique of German engineers. But if she were to betray his secrets, it obviously would not be to anyone of them. No, that was not it. It was more likely that in his exaggerated

passion for his country, he had suspected her of a design to get hold of the airman's plans—to play, as he had himself put it, the Delilah to Logan's Samson.

Well, that was what she would do. The excellent Herr Dermbach in trying to trick her into an admission had shown her the right course to pursue. Maurice had released her from her pledge of secrecy. She would act as became an English woman. But it was not a disinterested zeal for her country that moved her. She might indeed be able to drive a bargain with the British War Office. She pictured herself saying, "I have in my hands the plans of the new engine of destruction which Germany is preparing against you. Confess your injustice to my father—proclaim his innocence and these plans are yours." The daughter of the man England had branded as a traitor would save England from the danger that threatened her, and would extort from her an admission of her error and injustice.

That no government in Europe would drive such a bargain did not occur to the excited, enthusiastic English girl, as she walked swiftly in the direction of the forest.

"Maurice will love me all the more," she told herself. "He challenged me. He likes people who dare."

She reached the foot of the hill where his car had stopped and recognised the tree beneath whose branches they had exchanged their first words. She lingered lover-like at the spot. It seemed mean to take advantage of Maurice's absence, it was mad of her to constitute herself his opponent. She threw back her head impatiently, as though to shake aside these scruples. Somebody had said that all was fair in love and war—and this was both.

She plunged into the forest. Once her resolution

was taken, she had not paused to consider risks. She felt blindly impelled to do something. But she had to go slowly along the overgrown paths, drawing her skirt tightly round her, stopping at times to disengage herself from the brambles. She had time to think what she would do. She resolved to approach the shed from the rear, as on the first occasion, and study the details of the aeroplane through the ventilating holes. She wondered if she could climb a tree as the other spy had done. He had fallen, and she decided that with her narrow skirt she would certainly meet the same fate. Those in charge of the shed knew her for the fiancée of Maurice. If she were surprised, she would say she was looking for him. At the worst they could but send her off and report her conduct to her lover. She carried a tiny stylo pen, and with this she could make notes on the fly-leaf of her Tauchnitz novel.

She came at last within sight of the shed. She waited a long time hidden in the undergrowth, but no one appeared. Evidently the sentries kept no better guard than on the former occasion. At last she was emboldened to steal up to the wall of the shed. The rift through which she had entered had been boarded over. She selected a ventilating hole where the trees blocked a view on that side. It was too high to reach even on tip-toe, and she had perforce to clamber along a bough. She tore her dress badly and grazed her ankle. "My costume," she reflected, "is hardly suited to this sort of thing."

She reached the hole at last. She looked in. There was nothing to be seen inside—just turf and planking. She supposed she must be looking into a partition. She descended from her perch and crept along the wall. To her surprise she came upon an opening on

the ground level. It seemed to have been recently made. She peeped in.

The great shed was empty. The floor was strewn with planks and scraps of metal. In a dark corner a man was whistling and scribbling at a rough wooden desk. Her footfall made him turn round. It was Maurice Logan.

She threw herself into his arms and burst into tears. Then she broke into a peal of laughter.

" Sold, Miss Melrose ! " exclaimed Logan, holding her at arm's length and smiling at her. " Sold completely ! "

" But what have you done with it ? " she asked, looking round the dismantled interior. " Where is the aeroplane ? "

" You came to have another look at it, eh ? I guessed you would, so of course I took no chances. As you see, the little machine's gone, and I guess you won't find it again very easily. I'm just cleaning up a bit of the mess. Your friend the sergeant's outside somewhere."

" How frightfully mean of you," exclaimed Rhona, " after telling me that I could do my worst." She laughed outright. Her feeling was one of relief. She had done her utmost and failed. " So the war between us is ended—almost as soon as it began. I don't see that I can do any more, dear, do you ? "

" Well, I'm not your best adviser in these matters, but it seems to me that you have done all that could be required of you. You have even received honourable scars, I observe." He put his arm round her and glanced smiling at the rent in her skirt.

" Oh, for goodness sake, don't look at me," she cried, conscious of an indiscreet revelation of stocking. She retired to a corner of the shed, and by a liberal use

of pins succeeded in temporarily repairing her costume. Then she turned to him again.

"Now come along," he said, drawing her arm through his, "I want you to come along with me to Berlin to-night or to-morrow."

"To Berlin?" she repeated in astonishment.
"Why?"

"To catch a certain General von Themar, who was attaché in London thirteen years ago. He is there on a flying visit from St. Petersburg. I guess we may find him useful."

The girl clapped her hands. "Oh, that is splendid. You deserve a kiss for this. . . . Oh, really, I am awful. . . . We are not even engaged."

They emerged on to the terrace. It was strewn with planks and lumber. "Your declaration of war, young woman," remarked Logan thoughtfully, "has cost the Imperial Government a good few dollars in removal expenses."

CHAPTER IX

"I'm going to Berlin," she announced, bursting in upon Miss Netherby. "Now—to-night!"

"Really," said her aunt, raising her eyebrows, "with Mr. Logan in his aeroplane? Why?"

Rhona told her.

"I think I had better come too," said Miss Netherby. "I'm not a very conscientious chaperone, but still—. Besides, I know the details of the case better than you."

They packed with frantic haste. Barely two hours elapsed after Rhona's return before Logan appeared and drove them to the railway station. He had reserved three sleeping-berths in the night mail—a luxury of travel to which the ladies were not accustomed. Miss Netherby went to bed at once, protesting that if she were drawn into conversation she would never be able to sleep. Experienced traveller though she was Rhona thrilled as the long train, with its international coaches, its sleeping-cars, and busy mail vans, steamed out of the station on its long journey to the capital.

She turned to Maurice, her face glowing with excitement. "We're off!" she cried. "Isn't it splendid? The quest I vowed myself to has begun. Hurrah!"

Maurice smiled at her enthusiasm. As the express rushed on through the darkness she felt herself to be speeding to the succour of her father—of the father to whom such help meant nothing now. Wayside

stations flashed past. Neither man nor maid felt the least inclination to sleep. At Frankfort there was a great inrush of passengers, at Hanau much jolting and coupling up of coaches from the south. The lamps were darkened, and presently nothing was heard but the heavy breathing of sleeping passengers in the adjoining compartments blending with the sustained roaring of the train.

Rhona and Maurice paced softly up and down the dim corridor, pausing now and again to look out into the night. It was good, the girl felt, to be with him. She thought of that longer journey he wanted her to take with him, speeding to a distant goal. Ah, how joyfully would she promise, with what confidence would she accept his escort for always! But she knew he would not ask her for an answer till his self-imposed task was accomplished.

Of that task Logan spoke little. In reply to a telegram he had sent to London he had already received the copies of the newspapers containing the reports of Captain Melrose's trial, and, thanks to these, he had mastered all the details of the case which were known to the public. All the questions that suggested themselves he had reserved for Miss Netherby. So they talked of all manner of things intimately and clearly as most of us can talk only when the day and its distractions are far behind us. They came at last to the dawn of Logan's new life.

"I wish I knew who you were," she said. Then she touched his arm—"Not that you could be any dearer to me. But I hate to think that so much of what has gone to make you is hidden from me. I have often intended to ask you something. What did you dream about at the hospital and during the first few days of your recovered consciousness?"

"What did I dream about? Let me think. I dreamt once that I was on a very big steamer and was talking to the passengers, but I do not remember their faces."

"Well, that goes to prove that you were a stranger to the island, certainly. Did you ever have any dreams about people or places which you did not remember in your waking hours?"

"Yes. Once very clearly. I saw a little town with a big inn and a wide main street! I went down it and came to a shallow river with an old castle on a cliff to my left."

"Well, that does not suggest America. It is more like a scene in England or Germany."

"I might have been dreaming of a picture I had seen."

"You might, it's true. Did you recognise any place in America?"

"The entrance to New York Harbour struck me as vaguely familiar."

"Have you ever been to England?"

"Yes, once, to London. There again the docks and certain streets did not seem altogether strange, but I put this down to their likeness to other places I had visited."

Rhona mused. "Suppose you should be an Englishman after all?"

Logan pressed her hand. "Love me for what I am, dear heart, and don't think of what I may have been."

Suddenly she seemed to see the dark eyes of that woman with the flowing tresses gleaming in the darkness of the night outside.

She shuddered and clutched Maurice's arm.

"Oh, I'm silly," she said. "I wish we knew——. No, no, I don't. I don't ever want to know. Keep

down that shutter between us and the past won't you, Maurice? Promise me you will."

"Why, what's the matter, little girl? You are sleepy, I guess. To bed you must go. Yes, this instant. We shall be in Berlin in less than five hours. That's the way to your car."

He led her to the connecting passage between the coaches. She held his hand tightly and looked in his eyes.

"Suppose we should fail, Maurice? Supposing that we can't prove. . . .?"

"Nonsense. Count the thing as already done. I tell you, little girl, I always succeed, and I stake my own reputation and happiness on establishing your father's innocence."

"Oh, don't put it that way. . . ."

"Now go to bed at once. Good-night, dear."

He passed the night studying those thirteen-year-old newspapers, while the pile of cigar ash mounted ever higher at his elbow.

The case of Captain Melrose, Royal Artillery, bore a strong resemblance to that of Captain Dreyfus, which had convulsed Europe about the same time. In some way not divulged at the trial, the English Government became aware that highly confidential reports on two new quick-firing guns and other military secrets of importance had been betrayed to "another Power." That Power, though it was never named, was, of course, Germany. The Embassy was watched, and it was found that a messenger called every day for letters at a tobacconist's in Wardour Street.

A detective disguised as this man secured the letters, which all contained communications of a highly compromising character, and sometimes acknowledgments of money, amounts not stated. The tobacconist said

that the letters were always brought by a lady so thickly veiled that he had never been able to make out what she was like. Watch was kept for this woman, but she had evidently taken the alarm and was never caught. The letters were typewritten. It was proved that the information they contained could only have been in the possession of a limited number of officers. Of these Melrose was one. He was known to visit Germany frequently—as he declared, in the interests of his country, and to study the progress of military science. Unluckily for him, he had been in want of money for a long time past, but when his rooms were searched bank-notes to the value of £100 were found in an envelope under the carpet. He protested that the money must have been placed there by some person intending to ruin him, but he was unable to name any person whom he could suspect of such a design. The most damning evidence against him was that of the experts, who asserted that the letters had been typed on his machine, and that one or two words pencilled in were in his handwriting. Reading between the lines, Logan saw that the prosecution suspected the prisoner's wife of having been the veiled lady, but this was not specifically alleged. In spite of Melrose's asseverations of innocence, he was condemned. The verdict met with the approval of the public, though, as Logan now knew, in consequence of representations from Berlin, it was not at all acceptable to the English Court. Melrose's tragic death followed so soon by his young wife's silenced the popular indignation, and the newspapers of the time even expressed their satisfaction that an officer who had done good service for England should have escaped the last consequences of his inexplicable crime.

Logan replaced the papers in his dispatch-case, yawned and leaned out of the window. Raindrops

were falling, and the dawn breaking across the dreary plains of Brandenburg presaged a stormy day. It was well for Rhona that she could not see her lover's stern-set face at that moment.

"Will raising the shutter let in light or worse darkness on the past?" he asked himself. "If I fail my poor girl's heart will break."

CHAPTER X

IT was a chill, depressing morning when they reached Berlin. Rain was pouring in torrents, the sky was leaden. Logan betrayed no signs of dejection, and Miss Netherby, having slept soundly and breakfasted heartily, was in her usual cheerful humour. Rhona, however, was pale and irritable. "She's always like this on a grey day," whispered her aunt to Logan. "Nerves my dear man, nerves."

They drove to the Kaiserhof, where the airman had engaged rooms beforehand. Rhona, after a display of temper, was persuaded to go to bed again. "We certainly can't do any good at this hour of the morning," Logan pointed out.

Miss Netherby turned inquiringly towards him as soon as they were alone in the cosy little private sitting-room.

"Now please tell me exactly why you have brought us to this most detestable of cities at this uncouth time of year?"

"Well, Miss Netherby, I have made a pretty thorough study of your brother-in-law's case as far as it can be learnt from the reports, and I am obliged to admit that it will be a complicated tangle to unravel. The evidence looked pretty black against him, let us confess, and it was full of suppressions and fictitious names. Now, my idea is to take a short cut if we can—to cut the Gordian knot. This man, Von Themar, whom we have come to see, has told my friend, General Von

Herzfeld, the commandant of Mayence, that Captain Melrose was an innocent man. I propose to confront him with Miss Melrose and see what happens."

Miss Netherby looked doubtful. " You don't imagine that he will betray the other man, do you ? "

" It is not altogether impossible. Has it not occurred to you that the man may now be dead and Von Themar released from his pledge of secrecy ? "

" A possibility, I admit. I am not hopeful, but, of course, your plan is worth trying."

Logan left the English lady snugly ensconced in an armchair before the fire in the company of a Tauchnitz novel, and went in search of his man. He called at Von Themar's club and learnt that he was not expected there till the evening. The airman left his card and the note of introduction from Von Herzfeld, with a written request that Von Themar would make an appointment. On his return to the hotel he found the ladies dressed, as the fashion book says, " for the promenade."

Rhona had never visited the German capital before, and Miss Netherby had not set foot in it for many years. They had, therefore, a good deal to see. They drove in the Tiergarten, saw some of the not very numerous sights, and did a little shopping in the Friedrichstrasse. They returned to their hotel for lunch. As Rhona re-entered the sitting-room she cried out with surprise and delight. It had been transformed into a veritable bower of blossoms.

" Oh, that is sweet of you ! " she exclaimed, turning to her lover, who she guessed must be responsible for this unexpected decoration. He made an inarticulate noise, and turned rather red. " American ladies like a whole lot of flowers," he said, apologetically ; " I guessed you might like them too."

Rhona had recovered her spirits, and the conversation seemed to sparkle and effervesce like the champagne. "Keep that up," said Logan, admiringly. "We shall soon get anything we want out of these Germans if you can stick to that kind of way."

In the midst of the meal Logan was called to the telephone. It was a trunk call, he was informed.

"Is that Mr. Logan?" came a voice in broken English from a long way off.

"Yes. Who are you?"

"Von Herzfeld. I am speaking from Mayence. If you have any business with the Government—any favour to ask, I mean—use the utmost dispatch. That man Simborski seems highly incensed against you, and has gone to Berlin to complain of you to the War Office. He spoke of you as being mixed up with English spies—I am merely quoting his words—and has found out from some source or other that you know Miss Melrose. I do not imagine for one instant that he can do you any permanent harm, but he might succeed in creating a temporary bias against you in the Leipzigerstrasse."

(By the Leipzigerstrasse, the General meant the German War Office.)

"So there's some funny business on hand, eh?" said Logan. "Well, I'll railroad things. Thanks ever so much for telling me. Keep a sharp eye on the machine. There are more people than one who would like to smash it up."

He replaced the receiver and returned to the table. Not wishing to alarm or excite his companions unduly, he said that he had had news from Mayence which might compel him to return at any moment, so that they had no time to lose.

He strolled over to the War Office and asked to see

the Minister, to whom he was well known. It was, indeed, with him that he had negotiated the business of the aeroplane.

The Minister was absent. He was expected to return two days later, when the Emperor himself was expected to make a flying visit to the capital. Logan was received by one of the under-secretaries—an elegant young man who enlarged on the hardness of his lot in being left in Berlin at the end of August.

"By the by," he said, "Simborski was here this morning. He is very angry with you, Logan. He says that he will work with you no longer unless you withdraw your criticisms of his engine. He wants you to hand over the plans to him to carry out. That, of course, would set you free to leave Germany and do as you like."

"Do I understand that you are actually proposing that I should entrust the construction of a machine of my own invention to that flat-nosed Tartar?" asked Logan.

The under-secretary fidgeted. "Well, there would be certain advantages in the scheme for you—and for us. You see, you are a foreigner——"

"Go to blazes!" cried the American, in a sudden fit of anger. "If you don't want that machine I guess there are others who do. Good-day!"

And, in spite of the entreaties and apologies of the elegant young man, the American flung out of the office lighting a cigar before he did so to express his contempt for all its rules and regulations.

Once in the street he cursed himself for that exhibition of temper. He kicked himself. "You have ruined her last chance!" he told himself. The whimsical idea occurred to him, as once or twice before, of kidnapping Rhona and carrying her off to America

away from this labyrinth of State secrets, secret crimes, and open jealousies. He pictured her tramping beside him through the Adirondacks, lying back among the cushions of a boat on Lake George.

To his great relief he found a message from von Themar awaiting him on his return.

"DEAR MR. LOGAN," it ran, "it will give me very great pleasure to make the acquaintance of so intrepid and illustrious an aeronaut. I shall also be charmed to meet the English ladies in your company who you say are so kind as to wish to know me. As my stay in the capital is very brief, I hope you will meet me at the Royal Theatre to-night. I shall be at Box D.

"KUNO VON THEMAR."

Logan showed this message to his companions, who were awaiting him at tea in the lounge."

"Of course," he explained, "he doesn't know who the ladies are. It'll be a pleasant surprise for him in two senses. Anyway, he seems to be an amiable gentleman and real glad to see us."

He secured the box opposite to the General's by telephone, and slipped out to buy a dress suit—an article of attire which with characteristic carelessness in such matters he had neglected to bring with him. Rhona, it need hardly be said, had not forgotten her toilette de soirée. As the result of three hours' preparation, which involved losing her dinner, she appeared at last, a vision which left Logan quite breathless. She had chosen a gown of daring simplicity, whose soft opalescent embroideries enhanced the exquisite fairness of her skin, a gown in whose very simplicity women would have recognised the touch of a master hand.

"But, say! you do look fine!—my . . ." was all

that he could murmur as he hovered round her, dropping the wraps and the fan almost as quickly as she handed them to him, and awkwardly picking them up again.

" You never had any sisters, I can see," remarked Miss Netherby. Rhona glanced at her lover, but he did not seem to wince at this unintentional thrust.

They reached the theatre, thanks to Rhona's prolonged toilette, in the middle of the first act. General von Themar was in the opposite box. He was a very big man, bearing a certain resemblance to the Emperor Frederick, which he sedulously strove to accentuate. He was studying a pretty actress through an opera-glass, and did not notice their entrance into the box. For that matter, he would not have recognised them if he had.

" I remember him," said Miss Netherby in a low voice. " He has not changed much." Rhona's breath came faster as she gazed on the man sitting so unconcernedly a stone's throw away. Now and for thirteen years past he had it in his power by a single word to clear her father's honour and to brand another man as a traitor and a murderer.

Logan, being quite unable to understand the play, studied Von Themar's countenance. He decided that he was a bluff, good-humoured man, but probably of bulldog obstinacy. Then he let his eyes wander round the theatre. In the stalls he saw the ugly face of Simborski staring up at him with a very spiteful expression.

The Polish inventor lowered his eyes and, searching his pocket-book, produced a sealed envelope. He superscribed this with a pencil and handed it to an attendant standing by. Two minutes later Logan observed the man enter the box opposite and hand the letter to Von Themar. From behind the curtains Logan

levelled his glasses at the box. The General made a movement of surprise as he unfolded the letter ; he knitted his brows and then sat back for a moment in deep thought. Then he summoned the attendant, who, after a question, seemed to nod in the direction of the box occupied by Logan and his party. The General without turning in the direction indicated, wrote something on a card, gave it to the man, and at once left the box.

Five or six minutes later the card was brought to Logan. He read :

“ To my profound regret, I am obliged to leave Berlin without seeing you. Please offer my apologies to Miss Melrose. I hope on my next homecoming to make your acquaintance.”

“ K. VON TH.”

Logan pondered. “ Now how did he know she was Miss Melrose ? Simborski must have told him. But Simborski had that letter ready, and why should he object to the General’s meeting her ? ”

He showed the card to his companions. They appeared keenly disappointed. “ But what does it mean ? ” asked Rhona, her eyes suspiciously bright. “ He was so nice and so ready so meet us this afternoon.”

“ By the abrupt way he left one would almost think he had orders not to,” said her aunt, who had observed everything that passed.

They had no heart for the rest of the play. Logan invested them with their wraps and escorted them to the door of the theatre. Putting them into a cab, he promised to join them shortly and returned to await the end of the first act. In the vestibule, as he had expected, he met Simborski. The two men greeted each other stiffly, but civilly.

"Strange that we should meet in Berlin at this time of year," remarked the Pole, with something like a sneer, "so far from the scene of your labours and prospective great achievements."

"I'm here on a sort of pleasure trip," said Logan simply, "showing some Wiesbaden acquaintances found your city. By the way, do you know General von Themar, who was in Box D? I should like to be introduced to him."

"I do not know him except by sight and reputation."

"I beg pardon. I thought I saw you send him up a note."

"It was a letter entrusted to me by someone else."

Logan saw no reason to doubt the Pole's words. The General had not looked in his direction on receiving the note, and no signal of recognition had, as far as he had noticed, passed between them. The airman turned the talk on to professional subjects, but finding the other man increasingly sulky, wished him good-night and returned to the Kaiserhof.

Miss Netherby, to avoid what she foresaw must be a long and barren discussion, had very philosophically gone to bed. Rhona, still with her evening wrap about her white shoulders, sat in a retired corner of the vestibule. She looked pale and anxious, and the pile of cigarette ash on the little tray beside her showed by what means she had endeavoured to soothe her nerves.

She gazed questioningly at her lover, as he threw himself down on the couch beside her. He repeated his brief conversation with Simborski, and abstractedly lit a cigar. "It is either as your aunt suggested," he concluded, "that Simborski, for some strange reason, was selected to communicate superior orders to the General, or else that he was able to prejudice him against us."

Then he told her of his quarrel with the under-secretary.

"Well," he said, "there are plenty of shots yet left in my locker, so don't despair, little girl. You look tired. It's time you were in bed."

They passed up the great staircase side by side, and very close to each other. Outside her door she paused and looked into his eyes.

"You wish you had not undertaken this quest?" she said searching his face, "that I had not imposed all these conditions?"

He shrugged his shoulders ever so slightly. "I want you pretty badly, that's all," he replied.

"Well don't you think I want you?" she exclaimed promptly. "Do you think the love is all on one side? But we have got each other whatever happens—we love each other."

"Yes," said Maurice broodingly, "I have got you now; but how long shall I have you? You have imposed pretty stiff conditions. Suppose they are not fulfilled to your satisfaction?"

Rhona cast a swift glance round to see that they were alone and unobserved. Then she threw her arms round his neck, drew down his head, and kissed him tenderly.

"Then? Oh, it's no use to pretend. If the conditions were not fulfilled, well—I certainly couldn't send you away." She threw back her head and looked, laughing, into his eyes. "It's too late to talk about conditions. I belong to you for always, Maurice. I couldn't get away if I tried. How did you do it? How did you make me love you so much?"

"Search me," he laughed in an ecstasy of happiness. He clasped her to him and kissed her half a dozen times.

Then she pushed him away. "I will give it up now if you ask me. I believe I could, if you think it is a bar between us."

He was sorely tempted. He could see that in vowing to solve the mystery of her father's tragedy he had launched himself on deep waters which might wash him down. He was dazzled by the prospect of immediately possessing her. Supposing, too, that the quest were unduly prolonged—that she should grow weary of him. But, no; she wouldn't do that. A shadow flitted across his memory—that of the dark woman, that ghost of Palmiste. Suppose she were resurrected and came between him and his love? It would be wiser to take Rhona at her word, to rest content with what they had achieved, to take the good the gods offered. For a moment he wavered. It was not fair to her. He owed it to her to lift the veil from his own past as well as the shame from her father's name. His native hardness—what he would have called his grit—reasserted itself.

"No," he said stubbornly. "We will see this through first. One day you might remember that I diverted you from the main purpose of your life. Besides, I never give in. I don't know how. The fortune I shall bring you will be your father's recovered honour. Good-night."

Rhona gave him her lips half angrily. She was sorry that he had not taken her at her word.

CHAPTER XI

FOOLISHNESS often proves more profitable than wisdom, and rashness than prudence. Many a man owes his success to some act of impulse for which he cursed himself immediately after. Logan bitterly regretted his explosion of anger at the War Office, convinced that it would alienate the favour of the Emperor and put an end to all the influence he might have exerted in Berlin on Rhona's behalf.

He had ample leisure to chew the cud of bitter reflection. Rhona was never an early riser, and there being no waters to drink, Miss Netherby did not join him till the morning was far advanced. She saw that he was in bad humour.

She settled herself beside him in the lounge. "I dare say you will think I am fainthearted," she began, "but I wish that you could persuade Rhona to let the matter rest here. After all, she is the only person in the case who can be affected by the slur on her father's name. It cannot make any difference even to poor Archie himself. I am like most women innately practical. I don't want to risk Rhona's happiness by pursuing a dream. You two seem to be very much in love with each other. I wish to goodness you would marry her and settle down over here."

"I don't think we ought to give up hope till we have tried things at the other end," replied the American. "It took about five years to rehabilitate Dreyfus

remember. Also I may say at once that I am not sure that I, at any rate, can reckon on the favour of the Kaiser. As I told you, I had a row at the War Office, and there's a man called Simborski trying to get control of my operations. He has the advantage of me in being a German subject, and he has, I know, the ear of some highly-placed persons. You see, what I have to contend against is suspicion—because I'm a foreigner—and it's very difficult to fight suspicion."

He was cut short by the appearance of a page-boy with a letter.

He read it. "Well, now things are going to shape themselves," he said to Miss Netherby. "The Minister has come back in a hurry, apparently, and wants to see me at once."

"Well, don't do anything rash," was Miss Netherby's parting counsel.

The War Minister was a short, fat, bullet-headed man with a reputation for brusqueness and sarcasm. But, to Logan's surprise, he greeted him with effusive cordiality.

"Sit down, my dear Logan. Try one of these cigars—they are excellent, I think. You are lucky to catch me in Berlin. But the Kaiser—that marvellous, indefatigable man! I run to and fro—I had an audience of His Majesty yesterday. What is all this trouble between you and Simborski?" the Minister crossed his little fat legs and tried to look pleasant.

Logan briefly outlined the cause of the disagreement between him and the engineer.

"But you are not going to leave us on that account, Mr. Logan."

"Clearly," thought the American, "my bluster yesterday has frightened these folks and not freezed them off as I expected. Well," he said aloud, "I

gather you are suspicious of me. That is the worst of you Germans, Minister. Every foreigner who lands in your country you take to be a spy, even if he is taking your own money. I guess I'm fed up with it. If you think Simborski can build a better machine than I, why I'll pack up my papers and depart."

"My dear Logan, you are quite mistaken. We have unbounded confidence in you. Perhaps we are, as you say, a suspicious people. And, after all, you have been a little indiscreet."

"Is that so? What's the charge?"

The Minister waved his hand before him as if to brush aside these slight misunderstandings. "Oh, there's some absurd talk about you and an English lady. As if you couldn't know an English lady! But of course, I have to listen. It is said—you must not be offended—that she bribed the sentry with her gold watch to admit her to the shed. The man took the watch, but arrested her. Then it seems that you claimed her as your fiancée."

"I never heard anything about the watch," said Logan, slowly, "and I guess it's a lie. You seem to have been listening to a lot of idle gossip, and I can guess through what channel it has reached you. The lady you refer to is Miss Melrose, the daughter of the man who was falsely convicted of selling secrets to you thirteen years ago."

The Minister looked reminiscent. "I was under-secretary here at the time. Shocking affair—very."

"Well, I'm going to put it right," announced Logan, sulkily, "and as the business will take me to England, perhaps, as I said, you would like to give Simborski a trial. I shall be glad to see what they are doing over there. I want to see Grahame White, and have a look at some new machines they are building."

This thinly veiled threat was not without its effect on the War Minister. He shifted one knee to the other, and murmured, "Ach so."

Logan thought he would bluff a little further. He leaned back very much at his ease and watched the smoke of his cigar. "I'll be square with you, Minister. The difficulties with you have come rather opportunely for me. I shall have to ask a good many favours of the British War Office in order to sift this Melrose business, and the sooner I am free of engagements with other Powers the better I shall get on."

"You are certainly candid, Mr. Logan. I do not see what reason you have to complain of the Imperial Government. I don't think you will do much better at Whitehall. We Germans understand how to humour the caprices of genius. I quite understand that you are threatening us with England, Mr. Logan. These are, I suppose, American business methods."

"And doubting a man's honesty and prying into his relations with ladies are German methods, I suppose?"

The Minister rose and walked about the wide room. "We do not want to quarrel, Mr. Logan," he said, "and I may add, if you are interested in Miss Melrose, I marvel at your sympathy with England. You are quite right in saying that her father was an innocent man. He was treated disgracefully."

"How do you know he was innocent?" asked Logan lazily.

The Minister turned sharply on his heel and looked at him. "How do I know?"—he laughed—"Well, I continued to receive the same reports from England in the same hand six months after his death."

"This is very interesting, Minister," said Logan. "I suppose you would be glad enough to hear that Melrose's name was cleared."

The Minister shrugged his shoulders. "We are not anxious for an old scandal to be revived. They don't like us in England. Still, the traitor was an Englishman. We never knew his name—at least I did not, though Von Themar may have known it. He was known to me simply as X3." He stopped and searched the American's countenance. "Have you this affair very much at heart?"

"It will be the chief purpose of my life to clear it up."

The fat man considered. Logan knew very well what was in his mind, and with characteristic directness anticipated him.

"I can see, Minister, that you are prepared for a deal."

"Well, yes. I have the interests of the Empire to consider. I want to attach you to us. England won't help you. She does not care to put herself in the wrong and pay a heavy indemnity to the daughter of an unjustly condemned man."

"I understand that is not thought at all necessary in England," put in Logan.

"Perhaps not. Still, there's loss of prestige, party capital to be made out of it, and so forth. No, they won't help you." The Minister seated himself with such force on the heavily cushioned chair that he bounced a few inches. "Come, let us be reasonable men. If I help you in this you will never work for any other Power, eh?"

"That's a tall order," protested Logan, "and I don't know to what extent you will help me. I might promise not to work for any other Power, say for five or six years, without the Kaiser's leave. How does that proposition strike you?"

"That would do, I think," agreed the Minister thoughtfully.

"Yes, but what do I get for it—all the papers in the case?"

The Minister resumed his perambulations and appeared to be weighing matters in his mind. He looked keenly over his shoulder at the tall man, who sat smoking in the arm-chair, awaiting his offer. "You understand," he said, "I can't hand over the papers to you."

Logan noted the stress on the words "hand over."

"Well," he said, "it will be enough for me to see them, perhaps."

The Minister still hesitated. "The most I can give you is merely a possible clue. As I have told you, I don't know the man's name, and I wouldn't tell you if I did. I can only make you what the English call a sporting offer. If I let you see the papers will that bind you to us?"

"I'm a daring poker player, Minister. I'll take the risk."

Which, of course, was not as generous as it sounded, as Logan had had no desire throughout to quarrel with his German paymasters.

The Minister touched a button, and a messenger appeared. "Go to the Intelligence Department and bring me case 72A—England—1898."

The two men looked at each other when the servant had gone on his errand.

"Not merely as a matter of business," said Logan, "I may say, Minister, that I am real grateful to you for this."

"Thank you, Mr. Logan. It is disagreeable to me to reveal even this little to you, but—as they said at the Dreyfus trial—there are interests here superior to the defence."

The servant returned with a black dispatch box. He placed it on a side table and withdrew.

The Minister unlocked the box and took out several bundles of documents neatly tied, numbered and endorsed. The dates began with January 11th, 1898, and the last appeared to be February 16th, 1899. The Minister took one of the bundles at random and unfolded the papers of which it was composed for Logan's inspection. The documents were all in English and typewritten. For the most part they were headed simply, "Report on such and such a gun" or "Note on the New Infantry Firing Manual" or "Copy of the Instructions issued to such and such officers." Some of the communications were more personal in tone, and contained explanations of the difficulties the sender had met with in procuring this or that information. There were frequent acknowledgments of money.

Logan turned eagerly to the bundle marked August, 1898, which he knew covered the period of Melrose's arrest and trial. He went through the document without missing a word, but found only one allusion to the catastrophe then about to overwhelm the writer's brother officer. "In consequence of recent events, please direct all letters for me to Miss de Salta, 60, Georgina Terrace, Chelsea."

Logan made a note of the name and date. The Minister regarded him uneasily, as if he was not sure that this was allowed under their contract. From London the last document appeared to have been sent in the October of that year. There was an interval of four weeks, and then came notes on the armaments and fortifications of Gibraltar. There were no more precise indications of the writer's address. These latter communications were evidently written more

cautiously. They ceased quite abruptly, whether because the traitor had broken off his relations with the German Government or because his activities had been transferred to another area there was nothing to show.

The only handwriting was shown on a plan of the galleries of Gibraltar dated January, 1899.

Logan examined this critically.

"I suppose," he said to the Minister, carelessly, "this has no value now."

"Oh, none whatever. A plan twelve years old!"

"Then," said Logan, coolly placing it in his pocket-book, "you won't mind me keeping it."

"Put that back at once, Mr. Logan," commanded the little Minister with all the dignity at his disposal.

The airman laughed. "You said that you couldn't hand over the papers to me. Well, you haven't. Come, now, Minister, you have nothing to reproach yourself with, and you have done me a good turn. Besides, you know, you had no right to this document originally."

"You are unprincipled, sir."

"It seems to me that all the moralities have got shuffled badly in this deal. But you have driven a pretty good bargain. In return for a glance at these papers and an obsolete plan which may prove to be of no use to me at all I have bound myself to your Government for the next few years."

"I might call in a guard and have you seized."

"You might, but I do not think you will. But I have no objection to returning this plan when I have done with it."

The Minister looked at him with an air of resignation. "Well, we will not quarrel. I rely on you to keep our name as much as possible out of this inquiry."

" You will not find me ungrateful," said Logan gravely.

Grown man though he was, he could hardly restrain himself from executing a dance of delight once outside the Ministry.

" Hurrah ! " he congratulated himself, " the way is clear to Rhona now ! "

CHAPTER XII

ON a misty September evening, a week after Logan's visit to the Minister of War, Rhona and her aunt reached Victoria Station. The girl set foot in her native land after thirteen years' absence. She had left it a little child and returned to it a woman. She could vaguely remember herself, a little long-legged figure, in deepest mourning, clinging to her black-gowned aunt in the midst of all the turmoil at this very station, and fretfully demanding when father and mother were coming. Father and mother never came. Then there was not one in that crowd who would not have stared curiously at the child had he known her name. To-day men wondered who was that jolly pretty girl, but not one, had he been told, would have recalled the great military tragedy of the 'nineties.

Rhona was used to the sense of strangeness in a strange land, but her own land seemed to her the strangest of all. Here for the first time in thirteen years her own language was on everybody's lips, her lightest remark was understood of the casual passer-by. She was no longer "the English girl," accustomed to excite the remarks and curiosity of her neighbours.

She looked around in wonderment. She had so often dreamed of her native country, and here it was, a very concrete, noisy, living reality. London was just the same, but it seemed to have bought new clothes and new toys.

The hansom from which she had taken her last look at the beloved Kensington Gardens had through all these years become so identified with London that she felt it a species of disloyalty to step into a taxi. Taxis, motor-cars, motor-omnibuses—all these seemed to her essentially of France and Germany. She had never thought of them in London. As they drove along Cromwell Road, she gazed with disgust and disappointment at a troop of khaki-clad cavalry. Surely these were not the smart soldiers among whom her childhood had been spent. She was immensely relieved when she caught sight of a couple of lancers, clad in the familiar white and blue. She was glad they were not artillerymen. She wanted to prepare herself for the first sight of the once-familiar beloved uniform.

To one accustomed to the limited areas of Continental provincial cities, it seemed a very long drive to their destination. Miss Netherby, through the medium of a ladies' journal, had taken a small furnished flat in Longridge Road, Earl's Court. It seemed a reckless thing to do, engaging a flat at such a distance, but it turned out to be as cosy and well appointed as it had been represented. Rhona, while her aunt took over formal possession and edged the owner off the premises, wandered from room to room and gazed fascinated at the aristocratically-featured parlourmaid, so different from the ruddy, strapping Maries and Gretchens of her previous homes. She looked out of the window and found a surprising resemblance to herself in the big-hatted close-skirted girls returning from shopping to dinner. They gave her a sense of comradeship. She was at home. She realised that she had been abroad all these years. England after all was her country, she felt herself English to the core.

Yet she found herself quite unable to eat the

excellent English dinner which had been thoughtfully ordered by the outgoing occupant of the flat, and in the absence of any restaurants at Earl's Court, made her first meal in England of biscuits and of coffee made with her own hands.

They had come straight through from Berlin. It had been a long and tiring journey, Miss Netherby having defeated Logan's attempt to book sleeping berths for them on the "Luxe" train. He had no sooner informed Rhona of the clues he had obtained from the German War Office than she declared her intention of going at once to England to follow them up. She scorned her aunt's proposal to return first to Wiesbaden to dispose of the flat. On this point Logan supported her. He did not wish her to resume the acquaintance with Dermbach. He continued to suspect the German of having been one of the agents employed to corrupt the guilty officer, and likely, therefore, to do all he could to thwart his investigations. Moreover the airman had now doubly bound himself to the German Government, a fact of which Rhona was ignorant, and he dreaded lest she should again seek to discover the whereabouts of the aeroplane.

He therefore undertook to lock up the flat at Wiesbaden and to send on the articles they required. He could not accompany the ladies to London till he had completed another stage of the work he had in hand.

Rhona was keenly sensible of his absence even during the journey. She was a self-reliant girl, able to deal with Customs officers, cabmen and porters, but she missed his never-failing, yet never fussy, solicitude, his myriad little kindnesses and that restful sense of security which his presence seemed to diffuse. Her aunt, the companion of a lifetime, was with her, but she craved for the man she had not known a month before.

When the excitement and bustle of arrival had died away, she felt lonely and homesick. She went into her quiet bedroom and thought of what they would be doing at Wiesbaden at this hour. The explosion of fireworks at the Exhibition near by recalled to her mind that evening when Logan had fought down her shrinking from his love. She brushed the tears from her cheeks. "Homesickness—lovesickness," she said to herself. "I've got a bad attack. Homesick, too, in my own country. I ought to be ashamed of myself. One gets like this arriving at a strange place in the evening."

She slept very soundly on her native soil. In the morning, while she was still in bed, the trim maid-servant brought in a letter on a salver. It was from Logan—the first letter she had ever received from him. She tore open the envelope with feverish haste.

"Dearest little girl," wrote her lover, "by this time I hope you have arrived safe and sound, and are fixed up in your own country. I'm pretty busy here, but shall join you at the earliest moment, you may bet. It's real lonely without you, and I'm just crazy to see you again. Our friend Dermbach has left the hotel, but I heard from your servant that he had been enquiring after you, and was told that you had gone to England. I guess it's no good to ask you to sit quiet till I come, so if you want to start operations right away you had better call upon the solicitors who acted for your father. Don't forget that if the man we want is still in England your appearance on the scene will put him on the qui vive. So go slow in any enquiries you may think fit to make. This is a mighty poor love-letter, I reckon, but it's the first I ever wrote. But you know I'm just mad about you, Rhona girl,

and I miss you every hour of the day. Write to me soon."

The letter was certainly not a very fine specimen of its kind, but Rhona read it over several times and kissed the neat characteristic hand-writing passionately. She acted without delay upon her lover's instructions. Accompanied by Miss Netherby she found her way that morning to the offices of Messrs. MacAndrew and Raines, in New Square, Lincoln's Inn. They saw a managing clerk who had been in the service of the firm only three years past. Old Mr. MacAndrew, who had been in charge of the case, was dead, and his son, who was now senior partner, was travelling on the Continent and would not return till the end of the long vacation. The clerk promised to communicate with him, and said he would look up the papers connected with the case. It seemed as if Rhona's hurry to reach England had been in vain. The people on whom Miss Netherby might have cared to call were also out of town. Kensington was empty, so Rhona had nothing else to do but wait for Logan's almost telegraphic communications.

Being constitutionally incapable of inaction, she longed to begin investigations. Logan had furnished her with all the particulars he had been able to extract at Berlin. She pored over these at all hours of the day, wondering at which point to commence inquiries. The name and address of the woman, Miss de Salta, who had acted as go-between, proved too strong a temptation to her eagerness. Chelsea, she found, on studying the plan, was the next suburb. The maid informed her that it was connected with Earl's Court by a service of motor-omnibuses. Rhona could restrain her curiosity no longer. Hastily pinning on her

hat, she started off, without telling Miss Netherby, who was then enjoying her afternoon nap.

She found Georgina Terrace with some difficulty. It was a sort of backwater to the King's Road, and must be, she thought, the quietest spot in London. There were houses on one side only, standing in a gloomy row, each with a small square of garden in front of it. A row of plane trees now a little dusty and crumpled fringed the pavement, still further darkening the houses. The atmosphere at once suggested faded and melancholy romance. Number 60 was exactly like its neighbours. A few Michaelmas daisies and early chrysanthemums were struggling into blossom in the garden.

Rather wondering how a professional detective would open the campaign, Rhona pulled the bell violently. The handle came away in her hand. This was an auspicious beginning ; she was not to go away empty-handed at any rate. She hammered on the door with the knocker. There was no response. She continued to knock. Presently a musical voice from above inquired : "Who do you want ? "

She looked up and saw a girl about her own age standing on the tiny iron balcony immediately above her. "I want the landlady, I suppose," she answered.

"The landlady is out. Do you want rooms ? I don't think, properly speaking, there are any to let ; but I might let you have one of mine for a consideration. Would you care to look at it ? Of course, I should let you have it cheaper than Mrs. Gulf would."

"You are awfully kind," said Rhona ; "but I am not in want of rooms. In fact, I want to make inquiries about someone who stayed here a long time ago—thirteen years in fact."

"Hulloa! That sounds interesting. Wait a moment and I'll let you in."

Rhona heard her come downstairs, apparently three steps at a time. She opened the door and admitted the visitor into a narrow passage. She was tall, with a slight, boyish figure. Her hair was exceedingly red and desperately untidy. What one noticed first in her face was its extraordinary animation, due partly to a curious lift in her heavy eyebrows. She wore the inevitable serge dress, which Rhona now knew to have become almost the uniform of the London girl. It was very much the worse for wear, and was stained all down the front with ink. An ink-stain over the girl's upper lip gave a comical suggestion of a moustache.

"I'm the head lodger," she explained. "I occupy the whole first floor. Come up."

The whole first floor consisted seemingly of a very small front room and another box-like apartment adjoining. The front room, into which Rhona was ushered, was the untidiest room she had ever seen in her life. It was strewn with newspapers, penny magazines, and manuscripts in every stage of freshness and dilapidation. Photographs, mostly unmounted, were stuck in the mirror, and pinned, with a picturesque disregard for order, on the walls.

"I'm a journalist," explained the red-haired girl, sweeping a pile of manuscripts off the couch to make a place for Rhona. "My name is Mollie Fitzroy. Do tell me who you are inquiring after. It sounds awfully interesting."

"I'm inquiring after a Miss de Salta, who lived here thirteen years ago. I don't suppose you have lived here as long as that."

"No, but my landlady has. I dare say she will remember. What sort of person was she?—a relation?"

"No, she wasn't a relation," said Rhona, smiling a little at the other girl's eagerness.

"Any money left to her? No. . . . I wish you would tell me all about it. The fact is, I'm dead broke, if you know what that means, and a good story may just put me on my feet again. You seem an awfully decent girl. I wish you would let me help you. It may mean a lot to me. I suppose there is a story?"

Rhona found the girl's frank eagerness distinctly lovable. "Yes," she replied after a moment's consideration. "There is a story. I don't see why I shouldn't trust you with it, though I don't see how it can profit you. Did you ever hear of the Melrose case in '98?"

Miss Fitzroy shook her head, dislodging the last hair-pin in so doing. Rhona told her the story very briefly, while she listened with growing interest. "So you're his daughter?" she asked, scanning the visitor with a mixture of sympathy and undisguised curiosity.

"I'm Captain Melrose's daughter. From recent inquiries, I have learned that this Miss de Salta, whoever she may have been, played a vital part in the case. She was the go-between. I have no doubt that her identification and discovery would go far towards clearing my father."

Miss Fitzroy rose and waltzed slowly round the room, whistling "The Merry Widow" as she went. She halted before Rhona. "My dear girl," she said, "you will have to keep me out of this with a gun. What a scoop! I can be of immense assistance to you—you have no idea. You won't want a detective if you enlist my services. Why, it's the chance of a lifetime!"

"I'm sure I should be very glad of your help. I

think you are an awfully nice girl. I'm sure we shall be friends."

The two girls shook hands. "And now look here," said Miss Fitzroy, "you cut away home as soon as you can, and leave me to tackle Mrs. Gulf. She's a very peculiar old party—quaint isn't the word!—and she is sure to think that you are an agent of the Furnishing Company in disguise come about the overdue instalment. She isn't at all used to girls of your sort. Leave me your card, and I'll let you have a line by the morning."

By no means anxious to have an interview with the English lodging-house keeper of whom she had heard so much, Rhona took a card out of her letter-case, and, having with difficulty made a space for herself on the littered table, scribbled her London address upon it. She picked up her case again, shook hands with her new friend, and bade her au revoir.

Mollie Fitzroy picked up her skirts and executed an original dance expressive of triumph. Suddenly her eye was caught by something which lay on the table. She examined it curiously. "Hullo!" she ejaculated, "I wonder if she left this behind?"

CHAPTER XIII

IN the act of boiling a kettle over a flaming pile of rejected contributions and unpaid bills, Miss Fitzroy heard the back door open and the sound of a heavy body moving in the kitchen.

She rushed to the head of the stairs. "Is that you, Juliana?" she called sweetly.

"Juliana indeed!" came a wheezy voice. "Don't you Juliana me no more! I'm Mrs. Gulf to you and everyone, Miss Fitzroy, hereafter and for ever, and don't you forget it. I've just been round to the laundry. 'Mrs. Gulf' says that 'ussie there as pert as you please, 'perhaps you'd like to settle Miss Fitzroy's little account—only thirteen and eleven.' I was that took aback that I paid it like a lamb. I won't stand no more of your imponitions, Miss Fitzroy. I won't put up with you no longer, so mind that."

"I don't know why you speak to me so unkindly, Juliana," cried Mollie, trying hard to whimper. "You want me to have something to wear, don't you? I told you you could wash my things at home if you liked. And I've been longing for you all the afternoon. Come up here and talk to me. I've got some news for you."

"All right, young woman, I'm coming. Oh, yes."

A creaking of stairs, varied by much coughing and wheezing, announced the upward progress of Mrs. Gulf. She accomplished the journey in something less

than five minutes. It was wonderful that so small a house could contain so fat a woman. Her face was almost as broad as the rest of her, and was now redder than usual with the exertion of the ascent. She wore a black dress with bugles and a bonnet of the fashion peculiar to her kind. She collapsed on the couch which groaned beneath her weight, and crushed a shilling writing case, a broken fountain pen, and an indeterminate chaos of papers into a compact mass. She breathed deeply. "Them stairs!" she groaned.

Mollie placed a cushion behind her and sat beside her, stroking her hand. "Oh, poor Julie," she murmured soothingly, "what a shame! Did um's, then!"

But Mrs. Gulf repelled these blandishments. "Don't you come none of your wheedling tricks over me, Miss Fitzroy. Out you go to-morrow. Do you take me for a philandering institution?"

"Have a nice cup of tea, fresh made," insinuated Mollie.

"I don't want none of your nasty, smoky tea," said the irate dame with withering disdain. "I want your little account, my fine young lady. Ten pounds fourteen shillings and eightpence. And perhaps you'll be kind enough to put that card in the window again, what you had the impudence to take down."

The red-haired girl produced a cigarette from a yellow packet, lit it deliberately, and raised her oblique eyebrows with an air of resignation.

"Are we to have these scenes every Friday, Juliana?" she asked sternly. "They are getting very trying. As if I could help the beastly washing bill! And how many times am I to tell you that it is more convenient for me to settle my account half-yearly?"

Mrs. Gulf was about to speak, when her lodger checked her with an admonitory forefinger.

"No, now Julie, you must not excite yourself. I thought you loved me, Julie, I really did. It seems I was deceived in you. You only care for me for what you can get out of me. Never mind, I will go. I shall always think of those evenings at the Chelsea Empire and that nice time we had at the Chamber of Horrors—you remember, when I got that cheque from 'The Duchess' Companion.''" Mrs. Gulf's expression softened. "Still, that's all over. There's your card. 'The Adriatic's free to wed another!'"

And Miss Fitzroy dramatically stuck a card on the window sash. (It was a Carter, Paterson's card, but in the excess of her emotion neither lady noticed this.)

Mrs. Gulf regarded her uneasily. "Well, perhaps I spoke a little 'asty like. Friends we 'ave been and good friends, Mollie, I grant you. Yes, and I don't say but what you weren't the first to understand me. Which Gulf never did. Yes, and I shan't forget that it was you as saw I was one of them Norwegian 'oreines—"

"I only said that you reminded me of Nora and Hedda Gabler," said Miss Fitzroy, with a sigh. "But what boots it to recall these things now? All is over." And she began preparations for her instant departure by wrapping up the kettle in an *Evening News*.

Mrs. Gulf rose with a considerable effort and patted the girl's sloping shoulders. "Now, dearie, don't you take no notice of what I said. That's what you call my Spanish blood. "'Ot-tempered and 'asty I am, but I've got a good 'eart. You just stay as long as you like. But what with the furniture instalments overdue, and Mr. Ledpick downstairs never paying his rent—as bad as you 'e is—and one thing and another, I'm that upset. . . ."

"My poor Juliana, I'm the only one that understands you." Miss Fitzroy began to untie her landlady's bonnet-strings. "There—there. Sit down. I've struck oil at last."

"You don't mean to tell me that you've sold your story—that one about the Grand Duke and the Lyons' girl. Not that I can abide those saucy little cats myself."

"No," said Miss Fitzroy, tilting herself at a dangerous angle in the rocking-chair and blowing smoke rings very cleverly. "Something much better than that. It's a mystery, Juliana, and you and I are in it."

Mrs. Gulf blinked with pleasurable anticipation. She was by nature romantic, and she loved mysteries.

The girl leaned forward and hissed the question in her face. "Who was Miss de Salta?"

"Blest if I know," replied the dame, much startled.

Her lodger shook a warning finger. "Don't try to deceive me, Juliana. I mean the woman de Salta, who lived beneath your roof thirteen years ago."

"Well, what about 'er?"

"Ah! You remember her?"

"Well, now I come to think about it, I do. Thirteen year ago? That was the year after I buried Gulf. And the ob-sequels I gave that man! Everything so refined. If you—"

"Juliana, you trifler. You are deliberately evading my questions. Don't try your Hedda Gabler tricks on me. Tell me all you know about this mysterious—I may say, sinister—stranger."

"Lor', you do take one up so sharp! A foreign person she was." Mrs. Gulf having once started on a train of recollection became positively garrulous. "Miss de Salta! I should think I do remember 'er! You don't see girls like 'er every day. She was a

'andsome creature and no mistake, with a figure like I used to 'ave when I was 'er age. Not like some young ladies I know of what look like bluecoat boys. And such eyes—my word. Just like that lady we saw at the Lyceum who always wore teagowns and jabbed the chap in the shirt-front with a stiletto. And 'er 'air ! Just like I was when I was a girl. Funny you should 'ave seen that I was Norwegian or Spanish or some such thing, though my own family, the Bulgers, have been known and respected at Great Yarmouth these eighty years past, which a look at the churchyard is enough to convince the most incredible. But she was a 'andsome woman was Miss de Salta."

" Yes, but who was she ? How long did she stay here ? "

" I don't know who she was. I don't know who you are, if it comes to that. She stayed 'ere two months, if you want to know. In these very rooms. Yes, and paid regular—meaning no offence, my dear. She was that stylish ! A good thing, I says to myself, that I've buried Gulf. Just like those Ibsen chaps was Gulf. It was a pleasure to 'andle 'er things. ' Miss de Salta,' I says to 'er one day, ' with a face and a figure like yours, you ought to be on the stage.' ' Mrs. Gulf, ma'am,' she says, ' you don't know what you're saying. The gentleman I'm engaged to wouldn't 'ear of such a thing.' "

" Oh, she was engaged, then ? Did you ever see the man ? "

" Ah, that's what I can't say for sure, my dear, seeing that three or four gentlemen used to come and see 'er, and, of course, I didn't 'ave the nerve to ask ' which of you gentlemen is engaged to Miss de Salta.' Two of 'em was English, that I'll swear. All quite the gentleman, and used to leave 'alf-sovereigns for me

on the 'at-rack. Not that it wasn't all quite above board and respectable. They only came to tea in the afternoon and the door on the jar. There's some women that would 'ave listened, but I'm not that sort, as you well know. Not that I should 'ave understood if I 'ad, as they always talked in some foreign language."

"Did she ever get any letters?"

"Of course she did! Why shouldn't she? Most of 'em with foreign stamps on. Well, what's all this about? 'As she turned up again?'"

"No, Juliana; but it will be my business to find her. Now attend to my questions. Do you remember what the men who called on her looked like?"

"One was a tall, clean-shaven young chap about three or four and twenty. 'E was 'er young man, I fancy. 'E was the only one I ever caught a-kissing of 'er. I don't know that the others looked like anything to speak of."

Miss Fitzroy, immensely enjoying her rôle of Sherlock Holmes, blew another ring and surveyed the tips of her toes, which were now a little above the level of her head. "You must have heard their names?" she said.

"Well, if I did I don't call 'em to mind. I remember one thing about 'er, poor girl. One evening I took 'er in an evening paper, and presently she rushes into the bedroom here, and I peeps in and sees 'er a praying on 'er knees and a crying before a crucifix she'd fixed up in there. 'Lost a relative,' thinks I; but it was more like to be a row with 'er young man, for 'e didn't come near the place for some time after that, and when he came I 'eard 'igh words between 'em. And then a week or so later, she packs up her things all in a 'urry and sends for a 'ansom. 'Good-bye, Mrs. Galt,' she says, 'I'm going off to be married. Pray

for me, won't you ? ' which seemed a funny thing to say when she was going to be married. And she gives me a month's rent, though, of course, I'd no claim on 'er for more than a week. Off she goes—and that's the last I ever seed or 'eard of 'er till now. No letters never came for 'er after she'd gone."

Miss Fitzroy rose from her rocking-chair. " Umph, she grunted, " you must have been silly not to have found out where she had gone. However, I'm on her track. Well, our fortune's made, Juliana. I shall probably be made editor of the *Daily Mail* as the result of this job. The greatest journalistic sensation of modern times. ' Superhuman Sagacity of a Girl Journalist. The War Office exposed by Miss Fitzroy. Traitor Unmasked after Thirteen Years by a Lady Journalist. The Female Lecoq.' I can see the headlines." Miss Fitzroy paced the room in great excitement. She stopped suddenly. " Got any money ? "

" Not a halfpenny, dearie. I was reckoning on Mr. Ledpick."

" You sit down there and read my ' Lily of Loughborough Junction.' It's just back from *Petticoats*. It'll make you cry. How much does that man owe you ? "

" Thirty shillings."

" All right. Just wait."

Leaving her only and enthusiastic reader to peruse the latest of her rejected addresses, Miss Fitzroy descended the stairs with a firm tread and rapped smartly on the door of the ground floor front. A young man, smoking a meerschaum pipe and wearing a velveteen jacket appeared.

" Won't you come in, Miss Fitzroy ? "

" No, Mr. Ledpick. I'm here on business. Will it be convenient for you to settle Mrs. Gulf's account ? "

The young man frowned. "No, it will be in the highest degree inconvenient."

Miss Fitzroy at once gave vent to her righteous indignation. "Then I call it disgraceful. Keeping a poor widow out of her just dues! Do you think Mrs. Gulf is a philanthropic institution? Please remember that she has to pay her rent and taxes, and that you are not the only lodger dependent on her. I will not leave this place till you pay me ten shillings."

"Give me a kiss, Mollie Asthore, and I'll make it twelve and six."

Miss Fitzroy eyed him suspiciously. "Let me see the money first," she bargained.

Mr. Ledpick counted five half-crowns into his open palm. Mollie made a successful grab and bounded upstairs, shrieking with laughter.

"All right," cried the young man, looking wrathfully after her. "Carrots—that's what I call you—carrots!" And he banged the door.

"Here's ten shillings for you, Juliana," said Miss Fitzroy, appearing flushed and triumphant before her landlady. "I suppose I may borrow the odd half-crown."

"Welcome, my dear, I'm sure you're welcome."

"I'm going out—over to Earl's Court—for a couple of hours. We'll have some supper at the "Six Bells" when I come back. Now for the costume."

Mollie disappeared between the folding doors, and soon emerged in the costume, so distinguished because it was the only dress she had fit to wear in public. It was of a rough green cloth and suited her vivid colouring admirably. She looked at her green-stockinged feet.

"What about shoes?" she asked her hostess.

"Well, you've worn Miss Monthermer's before,

haven't you? It's all right. She won't be back till close on one. She's at the Shoreditch."

Mollie slipped upstairs, and came down shod in the absent artist's patent leathers. While she was buttoning them, she heard a wheezy croak proceeding from Mrs. Gulf.

"What's up?" she asked.

"Well, I never. 'Ere was you asking me all them questions about Miss de Salta, with her photo close under your 'and. And a speaking likeness it is, too."

Mollie having transacted business with the last button, looked up and saw Mrs. Golf admiring the faded yellow portrait which Rhona had pasted together again and had carried about in her letter-case.

"Oh, yes," said Miss Fitzroy, taking it from the landlady. "I might have guessed that was she. It was left by the person who made the inquiries. At least, I've never seen it here before. My hat will look all right at night, I suppose? Well, I'm off!"

CHAPTER XIV

Miss NETHERBY and her niece were sipping their after-dinner coffee when the bell sounded, and a minute later the maid brought in a card to Rhona. "It is Miss Fitzroy, the girl I was telling you about," she said. "Certainly she's lost no time in reporting."

"Have her in here," said Miss Netherby. "I am rather curious to see this young person. I hope she hasn't done her hair."

Mollie had done her hair, but the ride on the outside of the motor-omnibus had reduced it again almost to the disorder in which Rhona had first seen it. She was obviously greatly excited, and gasped as she shook hands.

"This is Miss Fitzroy; this is my aunt, Miss Netherby," said Rhona. "Please sit down. You smoke, I suppose?"

"Oh, rather. Thanks so much. Egyptians? Oh, yes, I smoke anything. What a jolly flat. How do you like being in England? But I've got tons of news for you. Talk about Sherlock Holmes. . . ."

Rhona completed the sentence. "I'm sure he's not in it with you."

"Have you ever done any detective work before, Miss Fitzroy?" asked Miss Netherby, surveying the newcomer with a critical eye.

"Well, not exactly. They put me on to track Carlotta de Vries' pug when it was stolen, but the

little beast turned up at the Dogs' Home before I could run it down. But I really am a heaven-born detective. You must let me have full charge of this case——”

“ For goodness sake tell us what you have found out first,” broke in Rhona, resting both elbows on the white tablecloth.

It was only at this moment that it dawned on Miss Fitzroy that she had nothing very vital to communicate. So she countered with a question.

She frowned at Rhona. “ Why didn't you tell me that you had Miss de Salta's portrait ? ”

Rhona was startled. “ But I never had it. What do you mean ? ”

“ Well, who is this, then ? ” Mollie produced the mutilated photograph with what was intended to be disconcerting suddenness. “ You left this at my place, didn't you ? ” —*

Rhona turned a shade paler and took the portrait. Her aunt leaned forward to look at it.

“ Yes, I must have left it behind, Miss Fitzroy ; but why do you suppose it is the portrait of the woman we are looking for ? ”

“ Because it was identified as such by my landlady, Juliana Gulf,” answered Mollie, in what she hoped was a Scotland Yard manner.

Rhona stared at her for the space of a minute incredulously, then her eyes travelled slowly back to the portrait. She continued to gaze at it as if fascinated, while every trace of colour left her face. She was white to the lips.

“ Do you mean to say,” she asked in a dull, unnatural voice, “ that Miss de Salta—the woman we are looking for—and this woman are the same person ? ”

“ I do. That's discovery number one.”

Miss Netherby, who had been looking in mystification from one girl to the other, rose, took the portrait from her niece's unresisting hand, and examined it closely.

"But you never told me you had this, Rhona," she said wonderingly. "Where did you get it?"

The girl did not answer, but passed her hand over her brow, as if puzzled.

"Do you mean to say," said Mollie, a little bewildered, "that you didn't know that had anything to do with the woman you were looking for?"

"No," said Rhona in a low voice. "This comes as a great surprise to me."

Her colour crept back to her face, and, averting her eyes from the other two women, she sat looking on the floor and drumming lightly with her fingers on the table.

There was an awkward pause. Mollie Fitzroy remembered that Sherlock Holmes always bullied his clients if they concealed anything from him, but she rather doubted if the ladies before her would allow themselves to be bullied.

"Well, what else did your landlady tell you?" inquired Miss Netherby, still scrutinising the photograph.

"May I have another cigarette? Thanks. She told me that she remembered Miss de Salta well. That she was a very beautiful person. Of course we can see that. Yes, and that she lived there thirteen years ago."

"Well, we knew that," said Miss Netherby. "Please go on."

Mollie glanced at Rhona, who still sat with averted face and downcast eyes, evidently listening intently.

"Exactly," continued the amateur detective in her high soprano. "Still, it is valuable confirmation.

And she used to have visitors—foreigners and Englishmen. She was engaged to one of the Englishmen—a tall, clean-shaven fellow about twenty-three. Did you speak, Miss Melrose? I beg pardon. And she went away to be married to him."

Again a pause. Mollie puffed furiously at her cigarette and let the ash fall on the lapels of her coat, according to her habit. Her revelations had impressed Miss Melrose anyway, she congratulated herself. The girl sat like a sphinx.

"So now I'm on the trail all right," added Mollie jauntily.

Miss Netherby shot an inquiring and solicitous glance at Rhona.

"Well," she said, "there seems to be a good deal to be found out yet, Miss Fitzroy. Have you any trace of the whereabouts of the woman? We have got to find her; that's the important thing."

Rhona sprang suddenly to her feet and walked towards the window. "I don't know about that," she said in her natural voice. "She may not be so useful after all. You have not any trace of her, I suppose, Miss Fitzroy?"

"Not as yet; but I have several promising clues, and I am confident of running her to earth in—er—let us say a month."

Rhona spoke, looking out into the street with her back towards them:

"Thirteen years is a long time. Perhaps she's dead."

Miss Fitzroy looked for a moment crestfallen. Then, recovering her assurance, she scoffed at the idea. "Not she. Now I come to think of it, I've seen her face somewhere. Quite lately."

"Where?"

There was a sharp note of anxiety in the inquiry.

Miss Fitzroy fidgeted. "I must look up my notes. But I say," she entreated, "do let me go on with this. It's the chance of a lifetime for me. You don't know how keen I am." She gulped.

Miss Netherby smiled at her kindly. She took in the threadbare costume, the faded hat, and the holes in her gloves. "Do have a liqueur, Miss Fitzroy," she said. "This is Benedictine. I dare say you can be of great assistance to us. Of course, there are other people interesting themselves in the case. There are our solicitors to be consulted, and a great friend of ours, Mr. Maurice Logan."

"You mean the flying man?"

"Yes."

"Oh, this is great," screamed Mollie, beating with her heels (or rather Miss Monthermer's) on the floor. "Do let me interview him. Is he here? I'll do him at once."

"No. He is in Germany at present, but I have no doubt he will allow you to interview him when he comes over. We expect him almost any day."

Rhona smiled coldly, lit a cigarette at one of the candles, and took up her favourite position before the fire. She bit her lips, and clasped and unclasped her hands convulsively. A hunted look crept into her blue eyes. The black-haired woman was looming up close to her now. She was coming to tear her lover away. And she had sent this feather-brained red-headed girl in search of her.

She laughed hysterically. Her aunt and Mollie Fitzroy looked up in surprise.

"Well, don't you think I've made a good beginning, Miss Melrose?" asked the girl-journalist. "You don't seem very pleased about it."

"Oh, I am pleased, tremendously pleased! You have done splendidly. You have found the very woman we were looking for. But I don't think it's worth while to follow this up. I feel sure somehow the woman must be dead."

"No fear," repeated Miss Fitzroy with conviction. "Well, I must be going. I hope to have some more news to-morrow. Perhaps I shall have found her."

Rhona shivered. "Let me see you to the station," she said with her bright smile, "I shall enjoy a breath of air."

She looked round for the photograph, but her aunt held it in her left hand while she bade good-bye to their visitor. The two girls passed into the street together, and walked towards Earl's Court Road.

"I want you to promise me," said Rhona, holding Mollie's thin arm, "that you will report any further discoveries you may make about this woman to me only—in private. I cannot tell you all my reasons——"

"You ought to, you know. I ought not to be left in the dark."

"There is no necessity for you to know this. It is not so much my secret as another's. That portrait came into my possession in a strange way. I can only say that the person who gave it to me would not care to know it was this De Salta's. So please report to me only."

"All right," assented Mollie grudgingly, "so long as you don't take the case away from me."

"I won't do that if I can help it, but I may have to ask you not to follow up this trail. But what about your expenses?"

Mollie waved her hand airily. "Oh, of course, I shall be paid by the papers. Still, if you could advance me half a sovereign——"

"Yes, I can. I will send it to you to-morrow by the first post, if that will do."

"Quite well. Here's my 'bus. Don't come any further. Good night."

Miss Fitzroy darted frantically across the Earl's Court Road.

Rhona returned slowly. Unable just then to face her aunt, she walked round the dimly-lit Nevern Square thinking deeply. It was a hideous coincidence. The man whom Miss de Salta was going to marry was about twenty-three, tall, clean-shaven. There were millions of men answering that description. Still, thirteen years ago—that would make him about thirty-five. That was probably Maurice's age. Suppose he had married her? The red-haired girl said she had seen her lately.

"I foresaw this," the girl told herself, "that night near Biebrich. I shall lose him. Oh, I can't bear it!"

The servant talking with the postman at the pillar-box caught the sound of a sob as the elegantly-dressed young lady passed.

Yet it would be disgraceful to turn back now. The woman, whatever she might be to Maurice, could free her father from dishonour. She must be found. After all, she might be dead. Mollie Fitzroy might be mistaken. Oh, she must be dead. Why, otherwise, had she not claimed Maurice? His portrait had appeared in so many papers. To find what had become of her, without letting Maurice know, then to act as circumstances might dictate—that was clearly the wisest course to take. Now to face Miss Netherby.

As she had expected, the first question put to her on re-entering the flat was: "I wish you would tell me how this photograph came into your possession."

Miss Netherby scrutinized the little brown square of

paper disapprovingly. "It's been torn in four pieces and then pasted together again," she remarked suspiciously. "The lady was evidently photographed in very airy attire."

Rhona, her hands behind her back, gazed down into the fire. "The portrait belonged to Maurice," she said in a low tone. "I may as well tell you that he has lost his memory. Yes. . . . I mean that his memory only extends back twelve years—to the volcanic eruption at St. Paul. He was the sole survivor. He has absolutely no recollection of his previous antecedents. That portrait was found in his coat pocket. That is all he knows about it."

An uncomfortable silence followed. "I wish you had told me this before," said the elder woman, uneasily.

"I respected Maurice's secret as long as I could."

"Yes, I know—" Miss Netherby considered the table-cloth attentively. "Then do I understand that Logan is not his real name?"

"I suppose not. He assumed it out there."

"And he has no idea at all who or what this woman was?"

"Of course not. He remembers nothing."

"It's not a portrait that any woman would give to a man with whom she was not on terms of—well, extreme intimacy."

Rhona took time to frame her reply. "He may have been an artist and she his model."

"Nonsense. Artists don't carry their models' photographs about with them. Besides, has Mr. Logan—as he calls himself—ever shown the least sign of artistic talent? That would not have gone with his memory. At least, I shouldn't think so. And now this person turns out to be Miss de Salta."

Rhona continued to stare moodily into the grate.

Her aunt sank back into an armchair and deliberated in silence for what seemed to the girl a very long time.

"Do you propose to marry Mr. Logan?" she asked abruptly.

"When he has fulfilled his promise to clear father's name; and—to be quite candid—even if he doesn't, yes."

Miss Netherby sighed. "I expected this," she said. "You began by imposing conditions, and now passion is proving too strong for you. For it is passion, Rhona—hot-headed, unreasoning passion. You fell in love with this man before you had known him forty-eight hours."

"I admit all that, but I feel as if I had known him all my life."

"I wish you had. Surely you realise the awful risks you would be taking in marrying a man who doesn't even know his own name, and whose past is buried in oblivion—a man of unknown antecedents?"

"What you mean, I suppose, is that he may be married already."

"Exactly. To this very woman possibly. Quite apart from her connection with your father's case, what would be your position if she turned up?"

"I don't care."

"What do you mean? You don't care?" There was a perceptible note of anger in Miss Netherby's voice. "Don't you realise what the consequences would be to you—and to your children?"

Rhona turned fiercely on her aunt. "I tell you," she almost screamed, "I have considered all this. He's worth the risk. Do you suppose I am going to wreck my life on these bare possibilities? Maurice *may* have been married—his wife *may* be alive—she *may* reappear," she repeated mockingly; "but I *do* love him, he *does* love me, and I'm going to marry him."

" Well, I think it disgusting ! "

" Anything else ? " inquired the younger woman defiantly.

" Nothing," said Miss Netherby, moving towards the door. She paused as she opened it and added : " Except that you shall not marry Mr. Logan, if I can help it, till he finds out whether he is free to marry you or not."

A defiant retort rose to Rhona's lips, but her derisive smile changed to a look of entreaty.

" I don't want to quarrel, auntie. Will you please not mention this—this discovery about the portrait being Miss de Salta's—to Maurice ? "

" Why not ? "

" Oh, for a thousand reasons ! " The girl spoke desperately. " Look here, if you won't promise me that, I'll go back to Germany to-morrow morning and sit on his doorstep till he's obliged to marry me out of very pity."

" I never thought to hear you speak like that, Rhona," said Miss Netherby, secretly a little afraid of the violence of her niece's passion.

" Well, will you promise ? "

" If you promise not to think of marrying him without giving me due notice, yes."

" I promise that. Meantime it's a truce. Good-night, auntie. I'm sorry——"

She was interrupted by the entrance of the maid with a letter. Miss Netherby opened it.

" The solicitors want to see us to-morrow morning," she announced. " In view of what has been discovered, I think you will agree that it is neither necessary nor desirable to wait for Mr. Logan. We can discuss affairs more freely without him. Good-night, dear."

CHAPTER XV

THEY were received at Lincoln's Inn next morning by the junior partner of the old-established firm of Macandrew and Raines in his sunny basement office. Owen Raines was a fresh-complexioned man in the early forties, with fine brown eyes and a silky fair moustache. He was dressed fashionably, even dandyishly, and wore gold-rimmed pince-nez. His manner showed him to be very much at his ease in ladies' society.

"Well," he said, assuming a professional attitude, "I have looked through all the papers in the late Captain Melrose's case, and"—with an apologetic glance towards Rhona—"I am bound to say that the Crown made out a pretty strong case. However, I understand that you have been put in possession of fresh evidence."

"We can prove," said Rhona, "that the German Government continued to receive information six months after my father's death."

As she spoke, she handed the solicitor the plan of the fortifications of Gibraltar, which Logan had abstracted from the War Office at Berlin. Her voice had an exultant ring as she went on: "I venture to think that the particulars of the armaments and the position of units will fix the date of the plan beyond all doubt. Moreover, I think the names and data written in will be in the same hand as the corrections

on the type-written documents falsely attributed to my father."

Mr. Raines studied the plan attentively. "This seems a valuable piece of evidence certainly," he admitted. "On the face of it, it is obviously an illicit document intended for the use of a foreign power. These particulars—and these"—he placed his finger on them—"sufficiently demonstrate that. How did you get hold of this plan, Miss Melrose?"

Rhona looked at her aunt and then at the lawyer. "Is it necessary to answer that?" she asked.

"It may not be necessary at the trial—assuming there is another trial. In cases where international questions are involved, a good deal of reserve and delicacy is permissible. But you must not have any secrets from me, Miss Melrose, if you want me to clear your father's memory." He smiled kindly. "I cannot estimate the value of this evidence till I know its origin."

"It was extracted in peculiar circumstances from the War Office at Berlin," said Miss Netherby decisively, "by our friend, Mr. Maurice Logan."

Mr. Raines looked extremely startled. He regarded Miss Netherby blankly for a moment. "Do you mean the flying man?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Is he—is he at all like this portrait?" asked the lawyer, obviously excited, as he drew a copy of the *Graphic* from beneath some papers, and handed it, his finger on a particular page, to Miss Netherby. He watched her anxiously.

Rhona, flushing deeply, rose and looked over her aunt's shoulder. "Yes," she said, her eyes glowing. "That is an excellent likeness. Why do you ask, Mr. Raines?"

"Oh, I am intensely interested in aviation, that's all," replied the solicitor, busily rearranging some papers. "It's quite a hobby of mine. . . . Do you know Mr. Logan quite well?"

"Yes," said Rhona, glad that Mr. Raines was not observing her. "It is he who has made it possible to reopen this case. We expect him over here soon."

"Do you, indeed? Er—r—what aged man is he?"

"About thirty-five or thirty-six. I don't know exactly."

"About thirty-five or thirty-six. He is an American, of course?"

Rhona's glance met her aunt's. "Well, we hardly know—" she began.

"There is some more evidence, Mr. Raines," interposed Miss Netherby, a trifle impatient of the solicitor's interest in airmen. "Mr. Logan also found that the traitor's letters were addressed about the time of the first trial to a Miss de Salta, at 60, Georgina Terrace, Chelsea. She no doubt was the veiled lady who took the letters to Wardour Street. Well, my niece called at this address yesterday, and not only does the landlady remember the woman, but—" Miss Netherby resolutely ignored an appealing glance from Rhona—"identified her as the original of this portrait."

"I really don't see—" began Rhona, but her aunt had already placed the photograph on the lawyer's desk.

"Ah!" Mr. Raines examined the portrait critically. "A handsome woman. Well, that is interesting. She might be traced. . . . Now how did you get this?"

Without glancing in Rhona's direction, Miss Netherby explained. "We owe it to Mr. Logan also. It was

found in his pocket when he was rescued from the ruins of St. Paul twelve years ago. It seems he completely lost his memory on that occasion, and has never recovered it. He lost all recollection whatsoever, as I understand, of his own identity and antecedents, and therefore, of course, has no idea who this woman is."

"What an extraordinary story!" exclaimed Raines. He was silent for a few seconds as though considering what effect it might have on the case. Then he asked sharply: "Have you told him yet that this woman has been identified?"

"No."

"Ah, that's right." The lawyer seemed relieved. "He's not to be told, mind!"

"That's what I say," cried Rhona delightedly.

Miss Netherby was puzzled. "I confess I don't see why not; but of course I should not act against your advice in such matters, Mr. Raines. We are in your hands."

"You must be content to remain there a little while." The solicitor laughed pleasantly, and smiled at Rhona. He perceived that his ruling with regard to the photograph was for some occult reason, particularly acceptable to her, and he wished he could in some way take advantage of the good impression made. He conducted his clients to the outer door of the office, and promised to acquaint them with the result of his deliberations within a few days.

Those few days were not the most pleasant that Rhona could remember. For the first time in her life, she felt estranged from her aunt. The necessity of avoiding as far as possible, all reference to her lover made conversation between them strained and awkward. In all Miss Netherby's efforts, too, to provide

distractions for her niece and to introduce her into London society, the girl persuaded herself that she detected insidious manœuvres to detach her from Logan. Her aunt succeeded in picking up the threads of some former acquaintances. People began to call ; they received invitations to dances and to dinners. It was not everybody who remembered the Melrose case, and to the few who did, it was whispered that the verdict would shortly be reversed. Rhona found callow subalterns and youths from Sandhurst thrown in her way. She flirted with them outrageously, partly, as she told herself, "to keep her hand in," partly to punish them for presuming to compete against Maurice.

She wrote to him almost daily, receiving almost telegraphic communications in reply. She realized that it was vain to expect him to express himself on paper. She was oppressed by a sense of bad faith towards him by withholding from him the fact of the identification of the photograph. After all, this might be the clue to his antecedents ; and might he not be the heir to considerable property, if not, as he had once laughingly suggested, to the Humbert millions, or even one of the missing Austrian archdukes.

She wondered why the lawyer also wished him to be kept in ignorance. Obviously the motive could hardly be the same as hers. Mr. Raines perhaps feared that on discovering Miss de Salta to have been in some way connected with him, the airman would wish to shield her, or at least refuse to help further in the case. She, on the contrary, decided that he would seize on to the clue and follow it up to the end.

Her conscience had almost ceased to prick her when she received a telegram from Mollie Fitzroy, worded : "Meet me Battersea Park Bun Kiosk three. Important."

Miss Netherby was luckily out at the moment, so she was able to obey the summons at once. She found the red-haired girl seated at a table in the little refreshment chalet, a plateful of cakes beside her. She jumped up eagerly at Rhona's approach. The attendant made a movement as if to intercept her, but retreated as she seized the newcomer by the arm and led her to a seat opposite her own.

"I'm jolly glad you have turned up," she confessed with a long-drawn sigh of relief. "My watch was an hour fast, and I've been here since two—ordering cakes all the time. When I got up to go I found I hadn't enough money to pay the bill—it's about half-a-crown. Have you got so much with you?"—anxiously.

"Yes, I think so," laughed Rhona. "But why on earth did you bring me over here? I thought Battersea was inhabited exclusively by lost dogs and the people looking for them."

"Well, I'm looking for a lost dog, so to speak, and—well, I'll tell you. Have a bun?"

Rhona was fond of buns, and munched one with gusto, while Miss Fitzroy manœuvred herself into an attitude befitting the gravity of the impending communication.

"I brought you here," she announced at length, "because you wished our negotiations to be conducted in secret. I have found her!"

Mollie tilted back her chair, frowned, and watched the effect of this communication on Miss Melrose.

Rhona turned very pale. "Who? Miss de Salta?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Oh, you silly girl! How maddening!" Rhona stamped her foot and clasped her hands round her

lifted knee, biting her lips as though to restrain her temper.

Miss Fitzroy betrayed her astonishment by the elevation of her eyebrows. "Well, I like that! A silly girl am I? Upon my word! . . . Didn't you ask me to find her?"

"Did I? I don't know." Rhona swung her foot to and fro in an evident excess of vexation.

Miss Fitzroy observed the foot, and wished she had such smart shoes and stockings. "Well," she said sulkily, "you did. And it's jolly hard lines after all the trouble I've taken to be called a fool."

"I'm so sorry," said Rhona penitently, "I ought not to have said that. I beg your pardon. I ought to have let you know our plans had changed." She looked away again, her heart beating very fast. That accursed woman of the photograph! She was alive then. Well, she had better know the worst. "Well, please tell me—where is this woman—where did you find her?"

"You need not look in the direction of the Dogs' Home," replied Miss Fitzroy, grimly. "She isn't there, as far as I know. . . . In fact, it may relieve you to hear that I don't exactly know where she is. . . . No; I saw her at a cinema show?"

"At a cinema show! Do you mean she is a pew-opener—I mean one of the girls who show you to your seat?"

"No, nothing of the sort. I mean that Juliana, my landlady and I, treated ourselves yesterday to a picture show in the King's Road, and in the heroine of a sketch—'The Grand Duke's Revenge'—Juliana recognised her—Miss de Salta. Of course we set up a scream, and went out and saw the manager, who promised to enquire—and this morning he told us that the films are quite new, and that he got them from a

place in Paris. I have the address. So I propose to go over to Paris to find her. I told you I had seen her face before somewhere."

The colour returned to Rhona's face. She gazed at the shrubberies of Battersea Park, thinking furiously. She turned to the angrily-expectant Mollie.

"To begin with," she said, "don't you think it possible your landlady may have been mistaken? As the heroine of what sounds like an historical melodrama, this woman would be dressed quite differently from what she was in 1898."

"Well, you're wrong," retorted Mollie firmly, "for it's a modern play, and the costumes haven't altered as much as all that; and in the last act the lady escapes in her nightdress and lets her hair down, and then of course there was no mistaking the resemblance to the photograph you have in your possession."

"Very well," said Rhona pettishly. "Let us assume it is the same woman. We don't know where she is, and we don't want to." She rose. "Let's get out of this. Here—waitress!"

She paid Mollie's bill and her own, and they walked slowly beside the lake. The girl-journalist stopped and gazed miserably at a fat duck. "Then you mean that you don't want me to go any further in this case?"

Rhona realized for the first time what the disappointment meant to the penniless girl. "I hope it doesn't mean that," she said kindly. "But—but for reasons I can't explain, I would rather that you said nothing about this woman for the present. Her re-appearance might do a great deal of mischief. I had hoped she was dead."

"I see . . . you fear her evidence?"

Rhona turned with blazing eyes upon the girl. "No! Not in the way you mean. As I told you the

other night, she may turn out to be connected with some one who must be spared." She coloured deeply and averted her face. Miss Fitzroy noticed this, and smiled.

"Well," she said, shrugging her sloping shoulders, "I shan't follow the trail any further, since you don't wish it."

Rhona paused to think. "If the woman is essential to proving my father's innocence, she must be produced at all costs. So your assistance may be invaluable after all. Tell me, are you—are you much disappointed by what I have said?"

"I am a bit," the journalist admitted gloomily. "It would have meant a good deal to me."

"Look here," said Rhona, "I promise you the exclusive right to communicate the particulars of this case to the Press, and I will bind my lawyer to that. Moreover, I will ask them if they can employ you in any other way upon it. I will ask them at once."

They had now passed out of the park into the street.

Reckless of all the proprieties, she rushed into a public-house which displayed a sign: "You may telephone from here," and rang up Messrs. MacAndrew and Raines.

"Yes, Mr. Raines was in. . . . Yes, he would be delighted to see Miss Melrose. . . . He had rather wished to have a talk with her privately. . . . Well, he seldom stayed at the office after five. . . . The Waldorf tea-room in half an hour."

Rhona hailed a cab.

"Good-bye," she said, shaking Mollie's hand warmly. "I dare say you think I'm a very horrid girl. But I'll do what I can for you."

Owen Raines was waiting for her in the vestibule of the Waldorf. He had reserved a table in a quiet

corner of the tea-room, to which he conducted her. From the respectful greetings of the waiter, Rhona gathered that he was a regular habitué of the place. In his manner towards her, at any rate, there was little to suggest the relation of solicitor and client.

"I'm very much flattered," he began, "by this mark of your confidence, Miss Melrose. I am very glad of it, too, because I felt at the interview that this matter had much better be discussed with the principal in the case alone than in the presence of third parties, however deeply interested."

He looked at his client as he said this. She was an astonishingly pretty girl, he thought, and he was no mean judge of women's looks. Rhona was fully aware of his admiration, which of course she was far from resenting. It was very necessary to make a friend of Mr. Raines. She bestowed on him one of her sweetest smiles.

"Now, I want you to tell me," she said, "whether the evidence of this woman de Salta is really essential to our case. We have told you how Mr. Logan came to be possessed of her photograph. Now, it will be very unpleasant for him if we unearth this creature and she recognises him and links him up with a past—"

"Which is better forgotten," interrupted the solicitor with unexpected alacrity. "Quite so." He put down his cup and gazed straight before him. "For a man with so promising a future nothing could be more dangerous. The revelation of his former identity might be absolutely disastrous. Of course, too, he would be in no position to contradict anything this woman might choose to say."

"I am glad that you look at things from my point of view," said Rhona, honestly delighted to find her attitude approved by an impartial person. "I see we

shall get on well together, Mr. Raines. But of course no consideration for Mr. Logan must be allowed in the slightest degree to weaken our case. Tell me honestly, as my legal adviser, is this woman's evidence essential to the vindication of my father's honour?"

She awaited his decision nervously. She was quite prepared, if he said yes, to reveal all that Mollie had told her, and to face the consequences.

He decided otherwise.

"To begin with, we may waste much valuable time trying to find the woman. The Crown failed to do so in '98, and we are not likely to be more successful thirteen years later. Then, again, why should we expect her to convict herself or her accomplice? If she did not come forward then, when she might have saved an innocent man's life, she is not likely to do so now. No, Miss Melrose, as far as I have had time to examine the evidence laid before me, I am justified in saying that we can dispense with the services of Miss de Salta."

Rhona drew a deep breath of relief. Mr. Raines, having delivered his speech, also seemed relieved, and drank a second cup of tea with relish.

"Mr. Logan may go back to America to-morrow," he said.

"Oh, I don't want him to do that," cried Rhona ingenuously. She laid her fingers on the lawyer's cuff. "I want you to do me a favour. I want you to entrust any inquiry work in connection with this case to a friend of mine." And she told him of Mollie Fitzroy, shamefully exaggerating her personal charms, her astuteness, and her eminence in her profession.

Owen Raines readily promised to do what he could for the young lady, and expressed his eagerness to oblige Miss Melrose on any and all occasions. He

escorted her to the Temple Station, chatting pleasantly; but he walked back to his flat in Cranbourn Street, thinking deeply. Rhona, in the train, naively wondered if he could have guessed why she did not wish Mr. Logan's past inquired into.

CHAPTER XVI

RHONA MELROSE was a distracting personality. Her passage through the world had everywhere been marked by emotional disturbances. Hitherto these had not been very far-reaching, for on the Continent the depth of a man's feeling for a woman is regulated by the amount of her income or possible dowry ; but a face and figure like hers were quite enough to upset the equilibrium of the hardest-hearted Englishman.

Owen Raines was a Welshman, but he was not less susceptible than the Saxon. He had lately found himself thinking about his client at all hours of the day. He waxed sentimental about her. It was significant that he had not troubled to inquire where his costs were to come from—and to force the British Government to reopen a case and own itself in the wrong, is not to be done without money. He had not always been rich, but he had made up for lost time, and in the last dozen years he had drained the cup of bachelor's pleasures pretty well to the dregs. Returning at night to his luxurious flat in Cranbourn Street, the lawyer would think of his beautiful country seat near Chepstow, and ask himself if it was not time that he settled down.

Something more than his professional pride was hurt by the intrusion of Maurice Logan into the case. The explanation of the airman's interest in the affair was obvious—so was the nature of Rhona's interest in him. Mr. Raines likewise had become deeply interested in

Mr. Logan, and was perplexed by his apparent connection with the woman de Salta. He had not failed to note that the address of Miss Fitzroy, given him by Rhona, was the same as the veiled lady's given in Logan's notes. The coincidence was tempting. Mr. Raines decided to conduct the preliminary investigations himself.

He lost no time. The day following the interview at "The Waldorf," he called at Georgina Terrace. He was held in parley by the outpost in the person of Mrs. Gulf, while Mollie reconnoitred him from the balcony above. Having given the most emphatic assurances that he was neither a process-server nor the representative of the furnishing company, and that he came on friendly intent, he was conducted with necessary slowness by the landlady into the presence of the head lodger. Mollie had taken up a professional and impressive attitude at her table, strewn with papers. She received him, pen poised in the air, as if in the very act of literary composition. Mrs. Gulf banged the door behind her and leaned against it in a truculent manner, plainly implying that if the intruder had deceived her as to his true character, he would nowise be suffered to depart.

"Now, sir," said Miss Fitzroy, "I have very little time to spare you. What can I do for you?"

"I am informed by Miss Melrose that you can do a great deal," replied the solicitor deferentially. "I am most anxious to secure your help in the investigation of her father's case. I am led to believe that you and Mrs. Gulf, whom I fancy I have the pleasure of seeing before me"—he bowed towards that lady—"hold the key to this painful mystery."

"Ah—h—" said Miss Fitzroy, leaning back in her chair and nibbling the end of her pen, "you want our

assistance. Well . . . I am a friend of Miss Melrose. There appears to be no reason, Juliana"—addressing the dame—"why we should not help this gentleman. Now what exactly do you want to know?"

Mrs. Gulf, somewhat disarmed by the visitor's words, now approached the table, and holding on to it with both hands, eyed him still a little suspiciously. Raines promptly rose and placed a chair for her. She subsided into it with a "Thank you, kindly."

"I want you to tell me all you can about this Miss de Salta," began the lawyer.

"Miss Melrose doesn't want Miss de Salta found," snapped Mollie.

"I don't want to find her. Miss Melrose is perfectly right. She herself would be of no use to us—no use whatever. I want to find the man for whom she acted as go-between."

"Well," said Miss Fitzroy, less confidently than before, "we can't tell you very much. Tell Mr. Raines all that you remember," she directed her landlady in a magisterial manner, pretending to busy herself with her writing. She listened attentively, but Juliana told the lawyer nothing that she had not told her when first she cross-examined her.

Raines was obviously disappointed, though he noted down the landlady's statements in a pocket-book. He pondered deeply. "You have no recollection what any of these men were like?" he questioned, "except that one was tall and clean-shaven and about twenty-three?" An inspiration came to the lawyer. Opening a letter-case, he produced a photograph, and handed it to Mrs. Gulf. "Have you ever seen that man before?" he asked, studying her expression keenly. "Was he one of her visitors?"

"Nice-looking young chap," remarked the dame,

hardly heeding the question. "Sort of saucy little twinkle in his eye, eh, what?"

She giggled and passed the portrait to Mollie, who examined it curiously.

Raines with a movement of impatience, took it out of her hands and hastily restored it to his letter-case. "Well, Mrs. Gulf," he repeated stiffly, "do you recognise that man as one of Miss de Salta's visitors?"

He watched her anxiously, as Mollie thought.

Juliana deliberated. "Well, I wouldn't say I did and I wouldn't say I didn't," she said at length, inwardly congratulating herself on her bearing under cross-examination.

"Come, come, Mrs. Gulf! Surely you can say more than that?"

Mollie broke in sternly. "Don't play the fool, Juliana! Was he one of them, or wasn't he?"

"You take me up so sharp," protested the landlady. "If you'd had two or three fresh lodgers coming and going every blessed month the last twenty years, you wouldn't find it so easy to remember a young chap's face that I only set eyes on half-a-dozen times. Well, he do remind me of one of the fellows that used to call on Miss de Salta, though which he was I'm sure I couldn't say, and I wouldn't swear I'd ever seen him at all, if it came to my affidavit, so there!"

Raines stroked his chin thoughtfully, as if weighing the value of this very qualified admission.

"Whose is that portrait?" asked Mollie abruptly.

"No one you know, Miss Fitzroy. Simply someone whom, for a moment, I wrongly suspected. . . . Obviously it would not be fair to name him, even to you." Raines turned once more to Mrs. Gulf, and smiled at her ingratiatingly. "You have a pretty good memory, I can see that, Mrs. Gulf. Now I believe that

if you liked you could even recollect one or two of these men's names. I am afraid you are too smart for me. I put myself in your hands. I can see that it's no use trying to cross-examine you."

Mr. Raines looked at the dame in a manner intended to express reluctant admiration for the superior acumen of an adversary. Mrs. Gulf purred with satisfaction, and crossed and re-crossed her hands in pleased embarrassment.

"Well, Mr. Snows," she admitted coyly, "It's not many things that escapes me, that's a fact. But what I choose to forget, well, then wild horses wouldn't drag it from me. But it's a funny thing you should ask me about them young fellow's names, for blest if I didn't read one only yesterday. All of a 'eap, it struck me. I saw it written on a cart."

"On a cart?" Raines and Mollie leaned forward, the girl quivering with eagerness. "Well, what was it?"

Mrs. Gulf looked discomfited. She fingered the corner of her apron nervously. "Well, lor' there, I've forgot it again!"

"You ought to be in a home, Juliana!" cried Mollie furiously.

"Come, come, Mrs. Gulf," said Raines encouragingly. "Was it anything like Stan—Stanton or Stanford by any chance?" He watched her narrowly.

"No it wasn't like that." The landlady stared forward till her eyes seemed to bulge out of her head; she grew purple in the face; she breathed with even more difficulty than usual. She was plainly putting her memory to no ordinary strain. A tremendous spasm appeared to convulse her. "I've got it!" she wheezed, "It was Swan! Yes, that's it."

The name seemed to recall nothing to the solicitor,

who promptly noted it down. "Well," he remarked, "this may prove to be a useful clue—"

Mrs. Gulf at this point rose upright and put her hands to her brow in the manner of tragedy queens. "I was wrong," she gasped, "it wasn't Swan—it was Edgar. I knew it had something to do with birds."

"But Edgar isn't a bird's name," put in Mollie crossly. "I suppose Swan and Edgar's cart put you in mind of it. Are you sure it wasn't Peter Robinson? or Jay?"—with a sudden inspiration—"A jay's a bird, too, you know."

No, Mrs. Gulf was sure it was Edgar. "Miss de Salta used to call 'im 'Edgar dear,' and she wouldn't 'ave called 'er young man by his family name, and I never 'eard of anybody being called Swan at 'is baptism—"

"Yes," said Raines, rising, "it was probably Edgar." He paused to consider, and seemed greatly relieved.

"The clue is worth following up at any rate," he said, half to himself. "Thank you, Mrs. Gulf. If you happen to recall anything more about your former guest and her visitors, I hope you will let me know. You will lay Miss Melrose under a great obligation, and you will not find me ungrateful."

Mollie conducted the lawyer downstairs. He paused and looked at her inquiringly. "I should like to make the old lady a present of some sort," he said, "or shall I send her a £5 note?"

"You'd better not do that," advised Mollie, "she's not that kind of woman. Spend it if you like on a gold watch and get Miss Melrose to send it to her."

"Thanks, I will—that's a good tip."

"I suppose you couldn't put any work my way?" asked the girl hesitatingly.

Mr. Raines considered her. Fine eyes, a good complexion, but altogether too gawky and angular. She

did not interest him, and he distrusted her inquisitiveness. Like most lawyers, he had no confidence in non-professional assistance. Also, he wanted Rhona to owe everything to him in this matter. And then by one of her characteristic indiscretions, Miss Fitzroy decided the doubt in his mind against herself.

"By the by," she remarked, "you asked Mrs. Gulf if the man's name was anything like Stanford." She knitted her brows. "I seem to remember some story about a man with a name like that. I can't think of it at the moment. Who was Stanford—the one you were thinking of?"

The solicitor met her frank look of inquiry with an elevation of the eyebrows, and a cold stare. "No one, I'm sure, you have ever heard of, Miss Fitzroy. I don't think you can be of any further assistance to us in this particular case. As you are a friend of Miss Melrose, I will do what I can for you. Would you care to undertake some inquiries in a divorce case?"

He had gauged her accurately. "No, I should not," she replied heatedly. "What do you take me for? A man who has got sick of his wife, I suppose, and is glad to make some money out of some other man who does care for her! That's the truth about nine-tenths of divorce suits. No fear!"

"I'm afraid you have too much delicacy to engage in investigations of a legal character, Miss Fitzroy," said the solicitor, extending his hand to the latch. "One thing I can promise you is that you shall be the exclusive medium through which this Melrose case is communicated to the Press. Perhaps that will be worth something to you."

"Yes, that will be A1—let me know the earliest possible moment."

Raines was outside the door. "In the meantime,

it's your own interest as it's ours, not a word to a soul!"—he adjured her with uplifted finger. "Mum's the word. Good-day!" And the door closed.

"A meddlesome, inquisitive little devil" was Owen Raines' verdict of the girl journalist, as he made his way back to Lincoln's Inn. "Evidently Rhona is frightened at the prospect of this woman turning up, so I can cure her fondness for this red-haired girl by saying that she's too keen on that scent. There are too many outsiders taking a hand in this case already."

He dispatched a clerk to study up the old Army Lists at the British Museum. The young fellow returned with the information that the only officer bearing the name of Edgar, stationed at Woolwich in the first half of 1898, was a Lieutenant Walter Edgar Darnley, Royal Artillery; and sure enough he had been detached to Gibraltar in the November of that year. His movements thus coincided exactly with the dates furnished by Logan.

Raines whistled gleefully. He knew he was on the right track, and Logan and Mollie Fitzroy would have to get up very early to forestall him. He drank a toast to Rhona in an extra glass of champagne at lunch, and as soon after as consideration for his health permitted, he proceeded to the War Office.

CHAPTER XVII

THE circumlocutory methods of Government offices are justly derided by our business men and are in vain excused by the deluded Socialist; but Mr. Raines was able to find out in a very short time a great deal that was interesting about Lieutenant Darnley. He discovered that this officer had received his commission in the Royal Artillery in 1896, and that eighteen months later he was detached to Woolwich Arsenal to conduct certain experiments with a new explosive. It was not alleged at Melrose's trial, nor did it appear from the documents at Berlin inspected by Logan, that any particulars concerning Darnley's special work had been divulged. That proved nothing in the young officer's favour, argued the lawyer, for he would, no doubt, have been shrewd enough to withhold the precise information which it was only in his power to give. It did not appear either that he had anything to do with the work on which Melrose and other officers were engaged. "But they would talk things over together," reflected Owen Raines, "and their various labours were all being conducted in the same building." Nothing seemed to have come of the lieutenant's experiments. In October he obtained a month's leave, ostensibly to be spent at Bournemouth. On his return he was again detached, probably at his own request, to Gibraltar, this time to investigate the value of a new kind of blasting powder.

And then came the most startling of all Mr. Raines' discoveries. At the end of February, 1899, Lieutenant Darnley obtained three days' leave for the purpose of recruiting his health at Ronda—a Spanish town a hundred miles from Gibraltar. He never reported himself again, and had ever since been posted as a deserter from the British Army.

Owen Raines returned to his own office well pleased with the result of his two mornings' work at Whitehall. He was now pretty well primed as to Lieutenant Darnley's official career, and all the facts so far elicited favoured the theory of his guilt. But who was Darnley? The next thing was to learn something about his private life. This was not at first sight easy. He had passed very few months with his battery, and that battery was now in Burmah. The lawyer anticipated that any inquiries addressed to the officer commanding respecting the private life of a former and disgraced officer would be very coldly and curtly answered. Besides, such inquiries would mean a considerable lapse of time, and at any moment "that confounded airman," as the Welshman had mentally dubbed Logan, might get hold of some fresh information and push himself once more to the fore.

The man of law decided, therefore, to report in person to his client without further delay. He returned to his chambers, and dressed with even more care than usual. On his way to Earl's Court he called at a fashionable florist, and selected a bouquet. As he laid it beside him on the seat of the cab he reflected with a complacent smile that such an offering from solicitor to client was sufficiently rare, and must clearly indicate more than a professional regard. He learnt, to his profound mortification, on reaching Longridge Road, that Miss Melrose was out. He was received,

instead, by Miss Netherby, who was unaffectedly glad to see him.

"That's right, Mr. Raines," she said approvingly, "I want you to look upon us as friends, not merely as clients."

"It's very kind of you to place me on that footing, my dear Miss Netherby. I want to be your friend; a case, too, of this peculiarly delicate and even romantic character could only be successfully undertaken by one whose heart was in it. I thought these few flowers might dispel the legal odour of the business."

Miss Netherby accepted the bouquet delightedly. "How very charming of you, Mr. Raines. Let us sit and chat in the firelight. I find these November evenings very cosy."

Sitting in the shadow she was able to study the appearance of her visitor, who sat in the full light of the cheerful fire. He was a good-looking man, she thought, and as the partner in a big firm was probably possessed of wealth. If his overtures of friendship were inspired, as she suspected, by interest in her niece, that interest might be worth encouraging.

"We have been fortunate in finding someone else to look at the case in that way," she remarked. "I mean Mr. Logan."

"Ah, quite so. Have you known him long?"

"Only since last August. I do not know what we should have done without him." Miss Netherby spoke in unmistakably regretful accents.

"Mr. Logan is, of course, in a better position than anyone to obtain information from Berlin," observed the lawyer diplomatically. He paused and added, as if reluctantly, "Though that circumstance unhappily is not calculated to prejudice the official mind over

here in his favour, or, indeed, to make him *persona grata* with the public in this country."

"That's exactly how I feel about his connection with this case," concurred Miss Netherby. "I like him personally very much, but I would rather that he had kept in the background. But it's not only that, Mr. Raines. You know his extraordinary history—or, rather, the absence of a history." Miss Netherby made a despairing gesture. "I keep on fidgeting about it. I am awfully sorry for him, but it is so unpleasant to feel that at any moment he may turn out to be somebody else altogether. I suppose you think me very ungrateful and snobbish, Mr. Raines?"

"I think your feeling very proper and natural, Miss Netherby. But has Mr. Logan no clue whatever to his past—has he made any effort at all to penetrate the mystery of his identity?"

"He has no other clue apparently but the woman's photograph, which may not prove the key to any very satisfactory antecedents. In fact, he does not seem to have interested himself at all seriously in the matter."

Miss Netherby relapsed into silence, and did not seem disposed to pursue the subject further. Owen Raines, not wishing to be suspected of any bias against Logan, broached the immediate object of his visit.

"I have not been idle since we last met, Miss Netherby," he began. "I feel more and more hopeful as we proceed. I have been making certain inquiries about the officers stationed at Woolwich during the period covered by the correspondence with Germany, and already my suspicions have been directed towards one of them."

Miss Netherby leaned forward eagerly. "Who?" she asked.

"A young officer of the name of Darnley—Lieutenant Walter Darnley."

"Walter Darnley! Oh, surely not! That's impossible."

"You knew him?"

"No, but—but I have heard about him. He could only have been a mere boy at the time—twenty-one or twenty-two."

"He is not the less to be suspected on that account," said Raines gravely. "Young officers with small pay and expensive tastes are more exposed to temptation than men of wider experience and more substantial means." Then he related all that he had been able to ascertain respecting the lieutenant, concluding with his desertion from Gibraltar in February, 1899.

Veronica Netherby listened, her mind evidently far back in the past. "Now," said the lawyer, "I want to find out all I can about this young man's family and private life. Can you tell me anything at all about him? Was he friendly with Captain Melrose?"

"They knew each other, of course." The fire suddenly blazed up and illumined Miss Netherby's face. The lawyer saw her wince. "I do not think he was fond of my brother-in-law," she admitted, with obvious reluctance. "In fact, I fear that he was in love with my sister, Mr. Raines."

Mr. Raines' professional experience enabled him to receive this announcement with an expression which might have been taken as signifying sympathy or an apology for intruding into the personal affairs of his client.

"If your fear turns out to be well grounded," he said, "it goes far to strengthen our theory and to explain why this young man should have contrived to fasten his guilt upon your sister's husband."

Miss Netherby sighed. "I suppose so. Of course I ought to have been prepared for some painful discovery of this kind. It was obvious that the traitor must have moved in the same circle as my brother-in-law—that he was someone whom I should at least know by name. Still, it comes as a shock."

"Your surprise as to Lieutenant Darnley's—er—sentiments was gathered, I take it, from remarks let drop by your sister. I am bound to ask you if his interest was in the least degree reciprocated."

"I am certain it was not," said Miss Netherby, flushing. "In her letters my sister refers first to Darnley as a clever young fellow of whom great things might be expected. Then she mentioned him quite often. She came down to see me in the country, and surprised me by her display of wealth. I asked her how she was able to spend money so freely, for I knew that her husband was very much embarrassed. To my surprise she told me that Mr. Darnley had shown her how to make money on the Turf. It may seem silly, but I was a little shocked and I begged her to have nothing to do with betting. Of course, she paid no attention to my remonstrances—she was as headstrong as her daughter—and laughed at my apprehensions. When I saw her in London she seemed very much worried, and said that she had made a most disagreeable discovery." Miss Netherby paused as though not liking to continue.

"I am afraid I must ask you to tell me all you know."

"Well, it seemed that instead of winning, as she supposed, she had been losing heavily over her racing transactions for some time past, and that her supposed winnings had simply come out of young Darnley's pockets. She owed him a considerable sum—she

did not know how much. She was also up to her ears in debt in other directions. Of course, there was a scene between her and the young man, and, to her astonishment—as I must believe—he told her that he was desperately in love with her."

"He must have been," put in the listener dryly, with the faintest suspicion of a sneer.

"Yes, though she was six or seven years his senior. Of course, she was frightfully shocked and indignant, and she sent him about his business. It seems he took it very badly. She never told Archie—her husband—as far as I know."

"Did she repay the money?"

"I should think it most improbable. For the two or three months before the trial she was at her wits' end for money. In fact, that was one of the reasons I had Rhona sent down to live with me. I never heard any more about Darnley, and his name was not so much as mentioned at the trial. I did hear that he had left England, and I supposed that it was grief at my sister's death and at the painful scandal attaching to his brother officer."

Raines looked into the fire and appeared to give the facts revealed to him careful consideration. "I may say that there is little doubt remaining in my own mind," he said, "that it was this man who sold the information to Germany. It is extremely probable that he hated your brother-in-law, though it is not necessary to suppose that he deliberately intended to fasten his guilt on him or anyone else, in the first instance. Indeed, it is just possible that the money found in Captain Melrose's room upon his arrest had been put there by Darnley to relieve your sister's necessities. Her needs were at once the explanation and, to his own mind, the excuse of his treason."

"But it is horrible to think that the money he lent my sister was the price——"

Mr. Raines made a deprecatory gesture. "Do not distress yourself by such reflections, my dear Miss Netherby. The money was not advanced to Mrs. Melrose out of pure benevolence, but in order to obtain influence over her. It is satisfactory to think that this ill-gotten money was spent in vain. I assume, of course, that Miss Melrose has not the faintest inkling of all this?"

"Good heavens, no." Miss Netherby leaned forward and scanned the lawyer's face. "It will not be necessary to tell her, surely?"

"Oh, no—almost certainly not. I dare say I shall be able to prove by other evidence that Darnley's expenditure exceeded his apparent means. To do that I must find out something about his family, and then, of course, I shall try to trace him. Meantime his name need not be mentioned to Miss Melrose."

The solicitor rose to take his leave, but Miss Netherby begged him to stay to dinner if he had no other engagement. He accepted the invitation with evident gratitude, in words implying that if he had had another engagement he would certainly have broken it. He was presently rewarded by the sight of Rhona returning from a shopping foray in Kensington High-street. She looked very warm and wintry in her grey velvet, and her cheeks showed rosy between the brim of her plumed hat and the soft folds of her stole. Her pleasure at seeing Raines was unmistakable, but he noticed that she was fingering a letter as if impatient to open it. He remarked with a pang of jealousy that the envelope bore a German stamp.

But there was nothing in Rhona's treatment of him at dinner to offend his sensibility. She was grateful

to him for his ready compliance with her wishes in regard to Logan, more grateful still when he told her that he had struck a promising trail and hoped before long to have a complete case ready to present to the War Office. She flashed on him her brightest smiles, she accepted his compliments even with a certain show of pleasure. She genuinely rather liked the man—as, indeed, most women did. After dinner she placed the cigarettes before him, and let him light the one she permitted herself. Miss Netherby observed all this, well pleased, but she was too discreet to betray her approval before her fiery-tempered niece.

"By the way," said Raines, venturing with some misgivings on to the topic, "does Mr. Logan propose to visit this country before the re-trial?"

"I fear not," replied Rhona, gazing thoughtfully into the fire. "I heard from him this evening. He expects to be kept hard at work till Christmas. The German Government seems to have become very exacting of late, and he has very little confidence in his assistant, a Herr Simborski. They had a quarrel and the man is jealous of him."

"So is someone else," was the lawyer's unspoken thought.

"Simborski?" said Miss Netherby. "Surely that is the man whom we saw in the theatre at Berlin?"

"Yes," said Rhona. "Maurice says that he met him in the Zeil at Frankfort two or three days ago with our old acquaintance, Dermbach. I wonder how they got to know each other. Herr Dermbach sent us his compliments and said he expected to be in London this winter."

Miss Netherby showed no more gratification than her niece at the prospect of renewing their acquaintance with the spectacled German journalist. "This man,"

she said to Raines, as the result of an afterthought, " might conceivably be of use to us. He claims to have known Archie in Germany."

Owen Raines smiled confidently. " He will have to come over very soon to be of use to us," he observed. " I am not letting the grass grow under our feet. I have put aside all other business to follow this up, and I am conducting the inquiries myself."

" How awfully good of you that is ! " cried Rhona, her eyes expressing her gratitude.

" Well, it's a case that appeals to one's most elementary notions of chivalry," said the solicitor, rising from his seat. " We lawyers have our moments of enthusiasm like other people."

He did himself no more than justice, though he said this merely to increase the girl's esteem for him. Captain Melrose, though dead, was his client, and for his clients, right or wrong, Owen Raines would fight with bulldog tenacity and absolute unscrupulousness.

He drove away from Longridge-road with a very pleasant memory of a friendly smile in bright eyes and the cordial pressure of a little white hand. " Good luck to Herr Simborski, whoever he is," he chuckled ; " and may he keep Mr. Maurice Logan busily employed till I have put this thing through."

He succeeded within the next two or three days in obtaining the bare particulars of Darnley's parentage from the Royal Military Academy, where the lieutenant had entered as a cadet. He was described as the only son of Richard Edgar Darnley, retired mining engineer, and Adelaide Martin, his wife, of Prince Consort-square, Birmingham. His birth certificate would have told almost as much.

Instead of communicating with " the country," as London solicitors call their provincial agents, Raines

took the next express to the great Midland city. He gained nothing by his precipitancy, for no one at the address given had heard of the Darnleys. He had, therefore, to turn the case over to his agents and to stay in the city while they made inquiries. These were completed next day. The lieutenant's mother had died soon after he had obtained his commission. A tradesman who had supplied the family had heard from the servants that father and son had always been on bad terms, and that after Mrs. Darnley's death the young man had visited home very rarely. The father had a reputation for meanness and had expected his son to live on his pay. Then there was some gossip about the lieutenant in connection with a foreign woman, and he came no more to Birmingham. When he was gazetted as a deserter, old Mr. Darnley sold the house and disappeared altogether from his neighbours' ken.

Mr. Raines promptly telephoned instructions to his head clerk in London, and on reaching his office three hours later found that these had been punctually executed. A copy of old Mr. Darnley's death certificate lay on his desk—it bore the date, July, 1906. The clerk had also looked up the dead man's will, and found that he had left his whole fortune to the Navy League.

On the whole, the lawyer was not dissatisfied with the result of his inquiries. True, he had not unearthed any evidence bearing directly on the Melrose case, but the allusion to the foreign woman and the tales about old Darnley's illiberality helped to confirm his theory of the young officer's guilt.

He had made preliminary inquiries after Griegas, the Levantine tobacconist at whose shop in Wardour Street the veiled lady had left the letters for the German emissary. The man had long since given up the business, but very probably he could be traced. If he were

shown the portrait of Miss de Salta, backed by a bank-note, no doubt he could be persuaded to recognise it. There would be no occasion, as the lawyer had assured Rhona, to hunt for the woman herself. Mr. Raines rather hoped she was dead.

He got up and paced the room in deep thought. Clearly Rhona dreaded that Logan might not be free to marry her. She might hear that the Spanish woman's fiancé at Chelsea was called Edgar, and would learn soon or late that this was Darnley's second name; but she must also know that Miss de Salta had several men friends—all quite possibly admirers—and that any one of these might have been Logan. Unless Logan's identity was established, he must remain open to a suspicion of this sort; and, concluded the righteous Raines, no girl would be right in marrying him.

She would be much better advised to marry a substantial solicitor with one of the finest estates in Monmouthshire and a good chance of a seat at the next election. Besides, the wife of an airman must be exposed to continual alarms and anxieties. It was horrible to think of Rhona's being delivered over to such anguish. It was equally painful to think of an airman of great promise abandoning his career for the sake of matrimony. It was most fortunate for Logan that he was unencumbered by family ties and property—so Owen Raines told himself.

He was debating these points in his mind, the day after his return from Birmingham, when Miss Melrose herself was announced.

"I could not restrain my impatience," she said, withdrawing her hand from his protracted pressure, "after what you told me the other night. I had a line, too, from Miss Fitzroy. She is up in Scotland, shadowing an American heiress for some paper. She tells me

to ask you if you have done anything with the clue her landlady gave you."

"Her landlady," repeated Raines ironically. "Well," he admitted reluctantly, "in a sense it was thanks to her that I struck the trail I am now on. You may trust me, Miss Melrose, to clear your father's name."

Her eyes were bright with eagerness and hope. "Oh, do tell me what you have found out!"

"I am confident that I have identified the real criminal. I would rather not tell you his name till I am absolutely positive."

He guessed that she would still attribute much of the merit of his discoveries to Mollie, and decided to make a romantic-sounding bid for her gratitude.

"You knew the man went to Gibraltar," he reminded her. "Well, he disappeared in the wilds of Southern Spain. I am going in person to track him down."

"Oh, that is splendid of you!"

Mr. Raines looked modestly at the carpet. "I anticipate difficulties," he said solemnly, "which I prefer to face myself. I hope you will accept this as the service not of a lawyer, but of a very devoted friend."

CHAPTER XVIII

As Mr. Raines sat enjoying a cigar in the snug smoking saloon of the Sud express, after an equally enjoyable six-course dinner, he wondered uneasily if Miss Melrose knew Spain as well as the rest of the Continent. For while he devoutly hoped that the "difficulties" of which he had spoken would present themselves to her imagination as most picturesque and terrifying, he confidently anticipated that they would amount to nothing more serious than an ill-cooked meal or a row with a Customs officer. He looked forward, indeed, to a pleasurable time. The climate of Andalusia is delightful in the early winter. He had excellent introductions to officers in Gibraltar, and he had heard that good sport was obtainable in the neighbourhood of San Roque. He congratulated himself on his good sense in prosecuting his inquiries so far south personally, instead of delegating them to a detective.

It is a long journey overland to Gibraltar, and as the lawyer had no desire to diminish the apparent magnitude of his undertaking, he prolonged it by a stay of three or four days at Madrid. "This may be your last bachelor trip, Owen, old boy," he affectionately reminded himself. South of the Spanish capital, the discomforts of railway travel satisfied his conscience that he was earning Rhona's gratitude more arduously than he had intended. "It isn't every girl I would

go through all that for," he grumbled, as the train ran alongside the little steamer at Algeciras, and the Rock loomed large and arrogant before him.

However, he was soon comfortably installed at the best hotel at Gibraltar. Within a few minutes of his arrival a telegram was handed to him. It ran : "Good luck and best wishes from Rhona Melrose!" And Mr. Raines felt abundantly consoled for all the hardships of Spanish travel.

He called upon his friends next day, and was everywhere received with that eager hospitality which Britons at the outposts of Empire extend to newcomers from home. The solicitor was at once made free of the club, enrolled as a member of the hunt, and deluged with invitations to dinners and receptions. The path of the amateur detective is not necessarily strewn with thorns.

" You fellows have treated me magnificently," he said to his particular friend and entertainer, Major O'Mahoney, as they sat over their wine ; " but I shall have to go slow with these card-parties and picnics. You see, I'm here on business, and it's business in which you military chaps ought to lend me a hand. I'm here in order to clear Captain Melrose of the charge on which he was convicted in '98, and his daughter, let me tell you, is the prettiest girl in England."

" Sure, it's the most romantic affair I ever heard of," affirmed the major, when his friend had entered somewhat more into detail, " and you mean to tell me that we have been sleeping peacefully in our beds while the Germans—bad luck to them—have had a plan of every gallery in the Rock in their possession these twelve years ? "

" See for yourself, my boy," returned the jovial Raines, and he produced the plan which Logan had

obtained at Berlin. "If you haven't shifted your guns and mines since this was drawn, I advise you to do it to-night. But what I particularly want you to do is to find out the exact date of the plan, which I shrewdly suspect will not be earlier than January, '99, that is, five months after Melrose's death."

Raines put the major under no injunctions of secrecy, and before long the romantic nature of his quest was known throughout military circles in Gibraltar. Indeed, his main difficulty was to keep the story out of the Press. His popularity went up by leaps and bounds. All the ladies took it for granted that he was going to marry Rhona Melrose, and he grew accustomed to hearing himself described as a knight errant and the champion of distressed damsels.

O'Mahoney took him to see no less a person than the Governor. His Excellency had been a good deal perturbed by the production of the plan. "This is a lucky find of yours, by George!" he said to the solicitor. "It is still sufficiently accurate in some of its details to make several changes necessary. I will give you a certificate that this plan could not have been drawn earlier than January, 1899."

"Thanks, your Excellency; that will save me a great deal of trouble. I hope at the same time you will extend me facilities for inquiries about the man Darnley, who, as I have told the major, I am convinced was the traitor and the author of this document."

No one at Gibraltar seemed to remember Darnley, but the records of his work had been preserved, and it was abundantly evident that he could have had access to the most secret parts of the fortress. Raines was lucky enough to obtain a specimen of his handwriting—a mere receipt for instruments and materials

used in his experiments. Though the writing on the plan had been disguised, the lawyer was satisfied that it was by the same hand.

It hardly seemed worth while to go any further. It did not matter much what had become of Darnley now that his guilt had been almost conclusively established. But just then a letter came from Rhona. She would have no rest, she declared, till the traitor, whoever he was, had undergone the doom which her father had unjustly suffered.

Raines, though he had never hesitated to crush a man if he stood in his way, was the least vindictive of men. The desire for revenge was inexplicable to him. "However," he mused, "if I give her his head on a charger, perhaps she will give me her finger in a ring in exchange."

Here, he said to himself, am I, a true-born Briton, working on her behalf in the wilds of Spain, or close to them, on the best of terms with the defenders of her country, and there is Logan, enjoying himself in Berlin, and working for Germany. No girl with an ounce of gratitude or patriotism could hesitate in her choice between us.

As it happened the genial major and two other officers were about to start on a shooting expedition in the country round Ronda. Raines had only to express the slightest interest in their plans to receive an invitation to join them. They set off one afternoon, about a fortnight after his arrival at Gibraltar, and reached their destination at nightfall. Ronda lies very high on the edge of a precipice, but neither the cold nor the cheerless gaol-like appearance of the hotel could damp the spirits of the party. Notwithstanding, Raines carefully noted the whitewashed walls of his bedroom, the uncompromising hardness of

the bed and simplicity of the cooking as hardships to be mentioned to Rhona with suitable exaggeration and emphasis later on.

He looked round him with considerable curiosity. This was the inn where Darnley had last been heard of. The lawyer had thoroughly familiarised himself by the perusal of the official dossier with all the circumstances, so far as they were known, of the lieutenant's disappearance. The young officer had stayed at the inn once or twice before, but appeared reserved and moody, and spent his time in tramping about the country. On his last visit he had simply passed the night at the hotel, paid his bill next morning, and ordered his luggage, which was much heavier than usual, to be sent to the railway station at Bobadilla to be called for. It was this circumstance that gave his disappearance the colour of desertion, for the station lies in the opposite direction to Gibraltar, on the line to Madrid and France. Darnley had then walked out of the inn with his sporting rifle and a knapsack, saying he intended to pick up his luggage later on. He had never been heard of again.

This had happened twelve years before, and Raines had not much hope of succeeding in a search wherein skilled detectives had failed. He found himself wondering whether the authorities had not reached the wrong conclusion after all. Darnley might have shot himself or been murdered. The unknown woman who had claimed his luggage at Bobadilla, and gone with it whither the careless officials had no idea, might as easily have been his slayer's accomplice as his own. She might even have been Miss de Salta, who, after shooting her lover or husband in a moment of fury, had walked off with his effects.

Feeling that Rhona had urged him upon a wild-

goose chase, Mr. Raines readily joined his companions in the pursuit of less elusive game. They passed over the terrifying gorge which splits the cliff in two, and clambered down into the valley. They took with them a local guide and an abundant supply of provisions. The solicitor was a good shot, and his bag soon excited the envy of his military friends. Seldom had he enjoyed a day's sport more thoroughly. They pushed far up into the sierra, where the birds were even more plentiful. And then, to his unspeakable disgust, Mr. Raines somehow contrived to let his gun fall over the edge of a bottomless ravine.

The soldiers roared with laughter, but presently became sympathetic. Their guide turned to the major and entered into voluble explanations in Spanish. "He says," the major told Raines, "that you can borrow an excellent gun from an innkeeper near here. It might be worth while to have a look at it."

Raines agreed, and the guide led them to a tumble-down posada, commanding a magnificent view of the country. The landlord made much of them, and through the major assured the unfortunate sportsman that his gun was the best in the province and the envy of all Andalusia. "It is an English gun," he said proudly.

"The fellow's a smuggler, you may bet your life," observed the major. "They all are in these parts. Probably the gun's a service rifle from Gib."

But, remarkably enough, it was not. It was a sporting gun, bearing the mark of a well-known Birmingham firm. Mr. Raines examined it curiously. Then he very nearly dropped it in surprise. Engraved on it he found the initials "W. E. D." and the date, 1898.

"This gun," he said, turning to his friends, "belonged

to that wretched Darnley, as I'm a sinner. Look at these initials if you doubt it. We must look into this. The poor beggar was probably murdered by this ruffian."

The guide, who understood English, at once broke out into indignant remonstrances. The inn-keeper, he maintained, was one of the most respectable men in the district, and had twice been mayor of the neighbouring village. The suspected man stood looking from one to the other, wondering what all this fuss was about. The Englishmen asked him to join them over a bottle of his best wine, and Raines proceeded to examine him through the medium of the major.

The man made no secret as to how the gun had come into his possession. It had been left behind twelve years before, he asserted, by Señor Dominguez, the husband of a lady who had been staying at the inn for a couple of months. Who was Señor Dominguez? A gentleman of Cadiz, he had always understood. Certainly he spoke Castilian, though with an accent which the Señora told him was that of northern Spain. The Señora herself was of Granada. The gentleman did not visit her very often. Oddly enough, on the occasion of his last visit no one saw him arrive. He had come, perhaps, by the path across the vineyard. The next day he hired mules to take himself and the Señora to Bobadilla. Pepe, the smuggler, conducted them. When Pepe returned he told him that Señor Dominguez had said that he, the landlord, could keep anything he might have left behind. He found only the gun and a mackintosh coat.

What was Señor Dominguez like? Caramba! he had only seen him four or five times, and that twelve years ago. He was as tall as the caballeros present,

but very much younger—perhaps only two-and-twenty. He recollects now that when he appeared unexpectedly at the inn the last time he had shaved his moustache, and that Lolita, the maid, said he had but done so that morning.

"Ask him," prompted Raines, "if he heard nothing about the English officer who had disappeared from Ronda."

No, the innkeeper remembered to have heard nothing about him. Besides living in a lonely spot he preferred to stand well with the smugglers and the caballeros in the hills, and if people disappeared—well, it was the business of the Guardia Civil to trace them.

"What train did the caballero take at Bobadilla Junction?" inquired the major.

"Ah, that was strange. Pepe reported that the Señor went off in the train to Cadiz, while the Señora remained weeping on the platform. She dismissed Pepe, saying that she would await the train to Cordova."

"Darnley right enough," commented Raines when this had been translated to him. "Ask him if he has still the mackintosh."

The innkeeper thought not. He took counsel with his wife, who consulted a slatternly-looking maid. If the caballeros would step into the garden they would see all that remained of the coat.

A large piece of the mackintosh had been used as a roofing for the fowl pen. The obliging landlord at once tore it off, and presented it with a low bow to Raines. "We are in luck," said the lawyer to his companions. "Look at this."

The name of the makers was still faintly visible on the strap inside the collar. It was Burberry's, London. Closer inspection even revealed a trace of the initial D.

" Well," said Mr. Raines, " I've had enough sport for to-day, and I've brought down my bird. Ask this man if he will accept a hundred pesetas for the gun. I suppose he is too proud to take a tip."

The bargain was struck with a great interchange of courtesies. As he rose to leave the lawyer took Miss de Salta's photograph out of his letter-case and asked the landlord if he recognised it as Señora Dominguez. Yes, he thought it was, but could not be sure after all these years.

That night at Ronda the incidents of the day's sport were forgotten in the discussion of the discovery by which it had been concluded. An hour before dawn Owen Raines was on his way to Cadiz. He reached that loveliest of sea-washed cities after an incredibly roundabout journey at nightfall. He was obliged to admit that the beauty of the silver city, rising straight out of the gleaming ocean, consoled him for the fatigues of the day.

He spent the next morning in searching the passenger lists of the steamers which sailed from Cadiz in February, 1899. He found that Señor Dominguez had booked his passage by the s.s. *Esmeralda*, leaving Cadiz on the last day of the month for St. Paul, on the West Indian island of Palmiste.

CHAPTER XIX

OWEN RAINES sat in his office the morning after his return from Spain. Among the letters awaiting him he found one from Miss Netherby. Its substance was contained in the postscript : "I hear that Mr. Logan will be over here very shortly. I regret this for the reasons I hinted at to you. I cannot help deplored the match which seems imminent."

Raines read these lines over again, and lying back in his chair studied the ceiling. On the table almost under his hand lay the answer he had received to the cablegram he had addressed from Cadiz to the steamship company's agent at St. Paul. "Dominguez landed here March 21st, 1899—no record of having left island—believed to have perished eruption."

For the hundredth time the solicitor reviewed the evidence he had accumulated. Miss Netherby's letter gave him every excuse to make use of it ; yet he hesitated.

"As a solicitor," he told himself, "I am entitled to form a conclusion only from the evidence, and to disregard mere impressions that appear to contradict them. Of course, the likeness deceived me—newspaper portraits are always unreliable. I frightened myself unnecessarily. Why should I, after all these years, have supposed that I remembered him ? These are the tricks which a too scrupulous conscience may play a man."

On the evidence Mr. Raines made up his mind that

only one conclusion could be reached. And, he argued very properly, that conclusion was not to be resisted simply because it happened to square with his own interests and aspirations.

"Am I vindictive?" he asked himself. "No; for I wish to spare the man the knowledge of his own guilt, and to let him pursue his new career, undimmed by any remorse."

These were generous sentiments, and in them Mr. Raines promptly took refuge whenever he was troubled by that haunting likeness and certain prickings of an over-sensitive conscience.

"I cannot escape the logic of facts." Thus he put it to himself, and pointed as if in answer to an imaginary accuser at the papers before him.

Rhona had not announced herself as engaged to Logan, yet Miss Netherby spoke of a match as imminent. It was manifestly Mr. Raines' duty as the family solicitor to lay before his client any facts which might affect her decision in so momentous a step. Perhaps, also, he was in duty bound to assist her inexperience and correct her partiality by submitting his own deductions from those facts.

He wrote to Miss Netherby, requesting her to call on him alone next morning.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon. Rhona was finishing the sixth page of her letter to her lover when her aunt came in. At the sight of her face the girl rose up in alarm.

"What's the matter?" she asked anxiously, approaching the older woman with tender solicitude.

Miss Netherby sank into a chair and answered with something like a faint groan. She looked at her niece. "Something dreadful has happened. I have just had an interview with Mr. Raines."

"Something dreadful," repeated the girl in bewilderment. She started and turned pale. It flashed upon her that further investigation might have revealed proofs of her father's guilt. The next instant she dismissed the unworthy, the impossible suspicion.

"For heaven's sake," she cried, "don't keep me in suspense. Tell me the worst and get it over. Has the guilty man been found or has he escaped us altogether?"

Miss Netherby bent forward and took her niece's hand. "My darling," she said tenderly and soothingly, "you must be brave. I have some terrible, some unexpected news for you. It will be a frightful shock. My poor, poor girl." And rising she drew the girl's face towards her and kissed her forehead.

Rhona disengaged herself and sat down looking expectantly at her aunt, who nerved herself for her task.

"Mr. Raines has come back from Spain," she began. "Before he went he made enquiries about all the officers who were or could have been at Woolwich while your father was there. His suspicions fell upon a young man, a lieutenant named Walter Darnley. Mr. Raines has found out that his father treated him very meanly. I—I happen to know myself, though I never saw him, that he lent people sums of money, which he ought not to have been able to afford." She paused and turned a shade paler. "I had better tell you the truth, Rhona. This man was in love with your mother."

The girl made a slight movement of her head as though to say she comprehended. Her aunt went on, now and again, with perceptible difficulty.

"He seems to have been a vicious young man. At the time he was professing a sort of platonic, chivalrous devotion to your mother he was seen about a great deal

with a foreign-looking woman—this Miss de Salta, it is to be assumed, from what Mollie Fitzroy told us. He seems to have promised to marry her, as you know. Perhaps he did so. She, of course, was the woman who took the letters to the tobacconist's in Wardour-street. Well, Mr. Raines found, as he had expected, that Darnley went to Gibraltar after the trial, and that there he could have had abundant opportunities for drawing the plan you have seen. He has identified the writing on the plan as his."

"Then father is cleared," cried Rhona triumphantly, raising her eyes and looking at her aunt. "Has Darnley been found?" she asked eagerly.

Miss Netherby averted her eyes. "Yes," she answered in a low voice; "I am coming to that now.

"Darnley deserted from Gibraltar in February, 1899. It seems that he had been accustomed to visit his wife, as she may have been, at an inn near Ronda, and passed himself off as a Spanish gentleman called Dominguez. Then he seems to have abandoned the woman. Mr. Raines traced him to Cadiz, and found that on February 28th he embarked for St. Paul."

Rhona started. "For St. Paul?" she repeated. "On February 28th, 1899? But the eruption took place in April that year. Was he killed?"

Miss Netherby bowed her head. "I wish he had been," she murmured.

"Then where is he?" demanded Rhona, vaguely conscious that a blow was about to fall.

"Oh, my dear, dear girl, are you not prepared for what is coming?" Miss Netherby clasped her hands appealingly. "Think it out for yourself. You know who has carried about the portrait of this woman, De Salta, all these years—who escaped from the ruins of St. Paul with that portrait in his pocket six weeks after

Darnley's landing—who, Mrs. Gulf said when Mr. Raines showed her his photograph, reminded her of Miss de Salta's visitor, and the age—twenty-two in '98!—that would be thirty-five now. My dear, my dear, can't you see?"

Rhona stared stupidly at her aunt. Only the quick breathing of the two women broke the silence of the room. A whistling from the railway seemed to release the springs of speech.

"For Heaven's sake," cried Rhona, standing up and gripping the arm of her chair, "tell me what you mean! Where is Darnley? Who is he?"

Miss Netherby rose also and retreated, shrinking, towards the window. "Why must I say it?" she protested. "Darnley is the man you call Maurice Logan."

Rhona stood upright, turned livid, then dropped backwards into her chair. Her aunt was at her side in an instant. The girl pushed her away, and covered her face with her hands. "It's a lie!" she muttered dully. "You and Raines hate him, and have planned this between you." But she was thinking rapidly and with horrible clearness. So many things came back to her—unimportant little things they had seemed—which now assumed a dreadful significance. She remembered his remark when relating his adventures in Hayti: "I was surprised to find that I could handle artillery." The sentiment of nationality meant nothing to him—it had meant nothing to Darnley.

"It's a lie," she persisted. Then she laughed harshly. "A silly lie, too. That he is the very man he was pursuing!"

Miss Netherby, kneeling beside her, could only look at her in mute appeal.

"Evidence!" rasped Rhona. "There's not enough

to hang a cat on. Darnley perishes in a catastrophe with ten thousand other people, one man survives, and you say that's he."

"That's not the only evidence, and you know it," said Miss Netherby, rising to her feet. She had recovered her nerve now, and she faced her niece. "Is it not strange that the one man who survived should have had the portrait of Darnley's wife in his pocket? Were there two English-speaking men on the same obscure island, at the same moment, both carrying the portrait of Miss de Salta about with them? Then there is Mrs. Gulf's testimony——"

"Have you become a devil to torture me like this?" screamed Rhona. "Do you understand that you are telling me that I love a man who betrayed his country and ruined my father? Do you want to drive me mad?"

Miss Netherby's arms dropped limply beside her. "You had to be told. Mr. Raines guessed that this man was something to you. He would not dare to tell you himself. Think over the facts as I have placed them before you. Use your own judgment."

Rhona walked to the window and gazed into the street. The world was going on quite as usual. It must be her fancy that it had suddenly grown very dark.

The maid came in to ask some question about dinner. Miss Netherby, with her eyes fixed on Rhona's back, gave the necessary instructions in a dry, mechanical voice. The maid withdrew.

"I will go to my room and think this over," said Rhona faintly. "Does Mr. Raines propose to have him—arrested?"

"No, he thinks he—Mr. Logan—need never be told the truth. Mr. Raines seems a merciful man. He

argues that—er—Mr. Logan became a new man after the earthquake, and that his past crimes should be left in oblivion."

"Then we are to condemn him unheard? He is not to be asked to disprove this theory?"

"How can he? He says he remembers nothing. It would be cruelty to tell him."

By a gesture Rhona signified that she could bear no more, and passed with bowed head out of the room. She sat down at her own writing table and buried her face in her hands.

"I must think this out clearly," she told herself. Her temples throbbed, she wanted to stretch herself on the bed and lose all consciousness. If the thing were true, she felt she would go mad. Merciful heavens! had not this man kissed her lips; had she not clasped the hand which had penned her father's destruction; had she sworn fidelity to the man she had sworn to bring to justice? If it were true she would feel polluted for ever—she could sear her lips with red-hot irons. But no! it couldn't be true. It was ridiculous—it was impossible. When her head was cooler, she would at once detect the flaw in the chain of evidence. She would prove quite easily that Darnley and Maurice were two distinct persons. It would be the easiest thing in the world. She shrieked with laughter. What a joke! How Maurice would enjoy it! Who was it laughing so loudly? Was it she or someone else? No, she had meant to cry. Just then Miss Netherby rushed in.

CHAPTER XX

IT was with no enviable feelings that Owen Raines called on Miss Netherby in compliance with her pressing request. As he reached the house at Earl's Court he could not recollect ever having experienced such trepidation in waiting upon any client. He glanced up at the windows. What might be going to happen inside he had no idea. Logan himself might be there, prepared to court the fullest investigation, challenging him to proceed further—challenging him, perhaps, to resort to other than legal remedies on the spot. Such an interview might place Mr. Raines at an unfair disadvantage. Rhona might revile him. However, here he was at the door.

Miss Netherby received him in the dining-room. There were no indications of the presence of Logan. He was glad of this ; he hated rows.

" It was good of you to come," said Miss Netherby, in a low tone. " Poor girl, she has taken it very badly. But she is quite calm, and a talk with you may do her good."

She led the solicitor into the drawing-room. Rhona was seated in an armchair, gazing fixedly into the fire. There were deep, black rings round her eyes, her face seemed thin and drawn, her forehead was seamed. She looked as if she were in the convalescent stage of a painful illness. Miss Netherby, after a tender glance at her, left her with the solicitor.

"I have been thinking over your disclosures to my aunt," began the girl in a dull, mechanical voice. "Preposterous and absurd though your theory seemed to me, I was bound in duty to my father to examine it." She passed her hand wearily over her brow. "I suppose you know that Mr.—Mr. Logan and I were attached to each other."

Raines bowed his head in token of assent.

"Well, of course," continued Rhona with an attempt at briskness, "I couldn't accept so horrible a theory without some corroborative evidence."

Raines stared at his feet. "You want more evidence?" he said.

"Of course. That would only be fair to Mr. Logan."

The solicitor coughed and stroked his moustache. He had expected her to say this, and knew what line to take.

"At present, Miss Melrose, I am concerned solely to present the case on behalf of your father to the War Office. After that, if you wish, I can make further inquiries as to this gentleman's identity. What sort of evidence would you be disposed to take as satisfactory?

"The people at Berlin must have seen Darnley, assuming he was the real traitor. They would certainly recognise him in a man they are in constant relation with."

"You give me the impression that the Attaché, General Von Themar, had not actually seen the man. Apart from that, I doubt very much if these people would recognise a man whom they had seen in such different circumstances thirteen years before. I don't suppose Darnley went to meet the German agents without some sort of disguise."

Mr. Raines paused as though to weigh the matter

more carefully. "Moreover," he went on, "the Germans are pledged not to reveal the name of the guilty man, and Mr. Logan would be the very last man on earth they would betray."

Rhona winced. She turned her face away and cast a haggard glance around her as though in search of some avenue of escape from the hideous conviction being forced upon her.

She found inspiration. "Darnley's relatives might be searched for. They would be able to identify him."

Mr. Raines spread out his legs and assumed a more pronouncedly judicial air. "Quite so, Miss Melrose," he agreed. "I haven't been able to trace any of Darnley's relatives so far, but we might advertise for them. But I am bound to remind you of what you are doing. I take it you are not animated by any vindictive feeling against Mr. Logan supposing that he does turn out to be Darnley?"

Rhona buried her face in her hands. "Go on," she said in a broken voice. "How can I answer that?"

Raines began to feel exceedingly uncomfortable. "Well, it seems to me that it would be hard and ungenerous to punish a man for anything he may have done in a life which he has utterly forgotten and done with. Darnley must have suffered a good deal in the circumstances of his desertion and probably in the eruption in which he lost all memory of his past life. To bring Mr. Logan down in the middle of his career—to drag him from pride of place into the felon's dock—for a crime of which he hasn't the least remembrance and which he would abhor—well, I don't believe you to be capable of that, Miss Melrose, and if you were, you would have to find another solicitor."

Rhona took her hands from before her eyes and looked at him with dry eyes.

"And so you fear for his sake to seek any further corroboration?"

"Exactly," affirmed the lawyer with the faintest trace of hesitation.

The girl pondered gloomily. "Yes, I see. If you found the relatives, of course he would have to know. Yet, perhaps not. Could we not find a photograph of Darnley?" She leant over the arm of her chair eagerly.

"I haven't been able to find one," said Raines uneasily. In fact, he hadn't tried. He rose, stood before the fire, and took up a more friendly and intimate attitude.

"Look here, Miss Melrose. I am going to talk to you more as a friend than a lawyer. As I am told, you have only known this man a few months, and you are not formally engaged to him. Of course, even if we hadn't reached this painful conclusion it would have been madness for you to have married a man who didn't know who he was or how he had spent more than half his life. But when all the evidence before us goes to show that this is the man who ruined your father, I cannot believe that you will hesitate as to the course to pursue. The least suspicion that he is the same man would be enough, I am sure, to fill you with a natural repugnance. But to prosecute inquiries further may convince you of what you now only suspect, and may fill you with hate and loathing for one whom you have held in esteem. And for him, the revelation of his former self would mean total ruin and unspeakable anguish of mind. The man would probably blow his brains out."

It all sounded very manly and straightforward. The girl clasped and unclasped her hands and stared into vacancy.

"I feel extremely sorry for you, Miss Melrose," continued Raines, watching her remorsefully. "One day, perhaps, you will realise what it costs me to inflict any pain on you. But your life and this man's can only be saved from total shipwreck in one way."

"And that is—?"

"By your renouncing all communication with him for ever, and by not letting him suspect the reason."

"Renouncing all communication with him for ever, without telling him the reason," repeated the girl. She laughed. "You think that's the best way to secure our happiness—his and mine?"

"Yes. I know, dear Miss Melrose, that it sounds strange; but that is the only way."

"And then he need never know? He would not be dragged into the case?"

Raines, anxious at all costs to get Logan out of the way, was ready to promise anything.

"We shall have to prove Darnley's guilt, but it is not our business to find him. That's the work of Scotland Yard, and I don't feel bound to render any assistance. No one would dream of connecting Darnley with Mr. Logan."

"And then, if he is Darnley, he escapes the penalty of his crime: the man who murdered my father will mount from success to success, and I shall read of the rewards conferred on him by kings and emperors."

Raines gnawed his moustache. "Well, what would you have? Disgrace him, if you will."

"Mr. Raines," said Rhona, looking straight into his eyes, "do you believe yourself that Maurice Logan and Walter Darnley are the same man?"

Raines met her gaze without a quiver of the eyelids. "Miss Melrose, you speak to a man who has practised the law half his lifetime. I am probably less subject

than you to those prepossessions and convictions which are often the result of partiality, fear, or desire. On the evidence before me I think it extremely probable that Maurice Logan was the man in whose stead your father suffered."

Rhona placed her hand quickly on her heart, withdrew it, and walked slowly about the room. "Then it's my duty to expose him and kill him," she said. There was something brutal in her accents and expression.

"You will be sorry if you do." Raines shrugged his shoulders. Then, changing his tone, he stepped forward and took her hand. "Come, come, Miss Melrose. Take the advice of one who cares for you—one who has lately undergone much peril and hardship for your sake." (The bad cooking and the hard bed at Ronda, for instance.) "Banish this man from your thoughts for ever. Renounce these unchristian projects of vengeance. Be content with the proclamation before all the world of your father's innocence—brought about by those who love you."

She sat down at a table with her back towards him. He could see her shoulders heaving. He heard a half-extinguished sob. He stuck his hands deep in his pockets, swore at himself under his breath, and left the room noiselessly. In the passage he met Miss Netherby. "It will be all right," he whispered reassuringly, "she's overwrought at present, but she will soon become reconciled to the facts. Let me know how she gets on." With a sympathetic pressure of the lady's hand he slipped out of the flat.

Miss Netherby stood still where he had left her, her face betraying her anxiety. She went in to her niece, and stood over her, clasping her hand in silent sympathy.

She was about to break the painful silence when she heard the bell ring. She listened silently, and heard someone enter. A moment later the maid put her head round the door, and beckoned to her unobserved by Rhona.

"What is it?" asked Miss Netherby in a low voice, joining the servant in the passage and closing the door behind her.

"It's Mr. Logan, miss," said the girl, vaguely conscious that something was amiss. "I told him that I thought Miss Melrose was unwell, but he would come in all the same. He's in the dining-room."

Veronica Netherby braced herself for the attack. She found the airman examining a recent photograph of Rhona.

"I have something unpleasant—something very painful to say," she began at once, disregarding his outstretched hand. "I must ask you to leave this flat at once. You must not see my niece. Something has been discovered—something very dreadful. She is almost prostrated. She will write to you."

Logan heard her without changing a muscle. "I'm afraid I cannot take that from you, Miss Netherby," he said quietly. "I have gathered from Rhona's letters that you are strongly opposed to our marriage. Miss Melrose is of full age—I could only take my dismissal from her personally."

"She will write to you," murmured Miss Netherby, deathly white.

"I must insist on seeing her."

"Very well, Mr. Logan. I wanted to spare both of you pain. I will see what she says."

Logan leaned with one hand on the chimney-piece, gazing sternly into the fire. Miss Netherby was gone for some ten or twelve minutes. Then the door opened

again, and she re-entered, followed by Rhona. The girl advanced to the table and then paused. She never once raised her eyes to her lover. He noticed that she was as pale as a corpse.

"Good Heavens, little girl, what's wrong?" he cried. He came towards her, but something in her expression caused him to halt.

"You wish to see me," she said in a steady voice. "I am sorry to tell you that I can never see you or speak to you again. I cannot tell you why. I won't tell you why if you beg me. If you care for me at all, as I believe you do, please go away and never set foot in England again. I—I wish you success. Please forget whatever has passed between us—as I shall; and please go at once."

Perhaps Logan turned a shade paler, but otherwise he betrayed no emotion. "You decline absolutely to state the reason for this step?" he asked.

"Absolutely."

"You are a truthful woman. Do you still love me?"

He and she had entirely forgotten the witness to their duel.

She clutched the table, half-raised her eyes, as if to seek his, then lowered them again. She bowed her head.

The words came at last. "I think I must hate you."

Logan bowed ceremoniously to her and to Miss Netherby. Then he walked out of the room. Presently they heard his retreating footsteps in the street outside.

CHAPTER XXI

"Good evening, Mr. Logan. Have you seen anything of our Wiesbaden friends lately?"

The airman was seated in a corner of the big Frankfort café. With his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his legs stretched out before him, and his eyes fixed on the tip of his boots, he appeared to be oblivious of the clatter all around him. Very much against his will he found himself relapsing, when alone, into these brown studies very often now. As he shut the door of Rhona's house behind him he had said to himself: "That's ended," and pretended that he would have no difficulty in putting her out of his life. He had seen so little of her—he had always got on so well without a sentimental interest—his work was so dear to him, so important, so full of adventure and novelty, that no woman, he was sure, could be necessary to him if he chose to do without her. Well . . . certainly the hours with the English girl had been the sweetest he could remember—he would admit that; . . . their memory exhaled an almost sensible fragrance at times—but it was just a fugitive, sensuous delight, which happened to a man, but must presently be forgotten. In after years, no doubt, he would think of his brief love passage as he might of some delicious tropical island touched and glimpsed at between sunrise and sunset during one of his voyages. The vision would grow fainter and fainter. He wished it ended

quickly. The pain of it bothered him. He shook himself impatiently, conscious of the sting.

And then he found himself looking at it in quite another way—more practically, as he would in such moods tell himself. Why should he be put out of her life like this without a word of explanation? Something in his past life. Well, what was it? Why should he be condemned unheard? His whole soul rose in revolt against this sacrifice. They concealed the facts for his own sake—pshaw! He was not afraid of the past or of its revelations. He did not believe he could have ever been a scoundrel. He felt himself clean all through. The breath of the volcano might have emptied the chambers of memory, but it could not have purified his whole personality. No, he reflected, he did not remember to have been much afraid of anything. Perhaps he had been married—to that woman. Rhona had sent back the photograph without a word. He often looked at it. Well, if she was his wife, let him go and find her. But if there had been anything ugly, back there behind that impassable screen, she knew, Rhona did—she must know—that it could not be fairly credited to him now. To condemn him for that was to condemn him for another man's crime.

His past, to which he had given so little thought, possessed for him a new interest. Was it worth while now to explore it? Curiosity said yes, prudence said no. He was honoured and prosperous. It were well to leave things as they were. He pondered and pondered, roused himself, and fell once more into a reverie. And presently his thoughts would stray to the girl he had lost, and he would see her once more on the balcony at Wiesbaden, the wind blowing her hair round her face as she snapped her fingers at him, or feel once more the pressure of her lips, the clinging of her body to his, as

in that glade in the Niederwald. . . . What else was there in life but this?—was it all over and done with, and he never to see her again? And then Logan, fearing for himself, would rise abruptly and go out in search of companionship, or work and hard material things. Deep down there was always that ache.

It was Dermbach who had broken in on his reverie at the café. He met his look curiously and then felt extraordinarily glad to see him. Of course the queer journalist belonged to the Rhona days, had sat with him in Rhona's room, had waited while he kissed her behind the door, could talk with him about her. He did not know that he wanted to talk about her, but some of the sunshine of those moments clung still to the spectacled newspaper man. He instantly made room for him on the seat.

"Have you seen Miss Netherby or Miss Melrose lately?" repeated Dermbach, beckoning to the waiter. "I called at the flat a long time ago and found it deserted. They are still in England, I am told."

"Yes," said Logan, dully. After all, it was not so pleasant to be talking about Rhona. "They are in England, and likely to remain there. I am not able to give you any information about their movements."

The other man set down his beer mug and glanced at him quickly. "So!" he ejaculated, "you don't know, then, whether they are proceeding with her father's case or not?"

"Yes, I understand it is proceeding—that it is in the lawyer's hands; but further than that I can't tell you."

Dermbach studied the depths of his mug. "Well, he remarked with a half sigh, "if you won't trust me, of course—"

"My good fellow, I have nothing to trust you with. I have told you all I know or am likely to know. In

fact," went on Logan with a powerful effort, "it's perhaps better to tell you at once that I am no longer in communication with Miss Netherby or her niece."

"I beg your pardon," said Dermbach, with a slight inclination of his head, "I am sorry that I broached the subject."

Logan was sorry too. This was the first time for two months that he had heard her name spoken. It seemed to set some chords vibrating deep within him. He could no longer rest. The noisy smoke-laden room became intolerable to him. "I must be going," he announced, standing up; and then dreading his own company, he asked: "Do you care to come along?"

Dermbach jumped eagerly to his feet. They were soon walking along the brilliantly-lighted *Zeil*, incommoding the sauntering, light-hearted crowds by their rapid swinging pace. Christmas was now at hand, and the old jovial German spirit was boisterously expressing itself. The festival had never meant anything to Logan; yet he remembered with something like a twinge, that there had been some talk of spending it with her.

Dermbach was speaking about Simborski; said he was a queer fish, wondered why he and Logan couldn't combine their designs. Logan, listening at first with an effort, embraced this topic as an escape from sadder thoughts. He answered mechanically, then plunged almost recklessly into the subject of his work. Gazing straight before him with pain-full eyes, he missed the sharp inquisitive glances which his companion directed at him from beneath his glasses. Dermbach was listening to him very attentively.

They paused outside a big hotel. "I live here," intimated the airman. "Care to come up and have a cocktail?"

It was odd how he clung to the company of this man, hoping, and yet dreading, that he would speak of her again.

Dermbach accepted the invitation with alacrity. They ascended to a comfortably furnished private sitting-room on the third floor. While his host was giving orders to the waiter, the visitor looked round him with interest. An open roll-top desk near the window was strewn with papers. Among them was plainly to be made out a large-scale plan, which Dermbach guessed to be that of the aeroplane. Beside it he could see photographs. He edged round the table towards the desk. Logan, without apparently having noticed the movement, stepped in front of him and rolled down the top of the desk with a snap.

"Now," he said, placing arm-chairs on each side of the fire, "make yourself at home. Try these cigars. . . . I first smoked them in Cuba twelve years ago and have stuck to them ever since. . . . Ah, here are the cocktails!"

The waiter withdrew. The two men smoked in silence. The noises from the hotel below and the street, reached them as from a long way off. The quiet within the circle of the shaded reading-lamp jarred on Logan. He made an effort to resume the conversation.

"Not a bad country, Cuba," he remarked, "I like it better than Hayti or Palmiste. Decidedly better than Palmiste"—he added with a grim smile.

"You know Palmiste?"

"Not so well as Palmiste knows me. I was the sole survivor of the eruption there in '98, and—well, the catastrophe fogged my memory quite a little as to what immediately went before."

"You were the sole survivor of that catastrophe,"

repeated Dermbach incredulously ; then, " Excuse me, —is there not something wrong with the lamp ? "

Logan leaned forward, putting his face close to the light, to examine it better. He turned to his visitor, who was watching him intently : " There's nothing wrong with the lamp," he said, wonderingly. " What made you think so ? "

" I beg your pardon. From where I am sitting the filament appeared to be broken or hanging loose. . . . So the catastrophe impaired your memory ? "

Logan knocked the ash off his cigar into the tray at his elbow. Rhona Melrose was almost the only person to whom he had revealed, since many years, the most remarkable circumstance of his life. He felt no particular desire to confide in this journalist ; on the other hand, the more closely he kept the secret, the less chance was there of the mystery of his antecedents ever being cleared up.

" Yes," he said, with an affectation of indifference, " I found that all sorts of little things had escaped me. Couldn't remember who was President of the United States, for instance "—he laughed—" or how exactly I had got to Palmiste. Oddly enough "—he resorted to an equivocation—" one or two of these things never came back to me. I am still puzzled to know who the deuce this girl was."

Moved by a sudden impulse, he thrust the dark woman's portrait beneath his visitor's glasses. Dermbach, in the shadow, appeared to be examining it attentively.

" You have no idea who this is or how the portrait came into your possession ? " he said meditatively.

" Not the ghost of an idea. I wish I did know. It's rather important just now."

Perhaps Dermbach detected the note of anxiety in

the airman's voice. "Why?" he asked sharply. "Has this woman any importance? Why do you wish to find her?"

"I have invited that question, I admit," returned Logan, thoughtfully, "but, after all, I see no advantage in giving you my private reasons, unless—which is improbable—you could help me to find her."

The two men looked fixedly at each other. It may be that the emotional experiences of the last few months had stimulated Logan's intuition, for he felt that a crisis was impending.

"Mr. Logan," said Dermbach quietly, "you would do well to be frank with me. I know perfectly well who you are. Now why do you wish——"

"You know perfectly well who I am!" cried the airman, springing to his feet, "Who am I then? Tell me at once."

It was Dermbach's turn to be astounded. "You ask me that? Is it possible—what? You have forgotten that also—your own name?"

"That's it," Logan nodded.

He waited for the other man to speak, but the journalist was in no hurry to do so. His eyes roved from the airman's face to the portrait he held between his fingers. Then he rose and paced to and fro between the table and the desk, as if deliberating some problem in his mind.

Logan watched him uneasily. Was it out of consideration for him that he hesitated like the others to tell him? "Out with it," he said harshly, "you journalists are not usually considerate of other people's feelings. Every wretched rag in England published the other day the real name of some poor devil who was hanged—dragging an honourable family through the mire to make a few extra halfpence. You are ready

enough to blast a woman's reputation—to screech out men and women's secrets and hound some miserable clergyman half across the world—ay, and to blab out secrets that will set nations at each other's throats—and now, when a man asks to hear the worst about himself, you think it kinder not to tell him ! ”

The fierce scorn in Logan's words and tone might have goaded the thickest-skinned journalist into anger ; but Dermbach merely stopped to listen as if struck by some new point of view. He turned and looked at the desk ; then again at Logan.

“ It is then about yourself that you want to know,” he said softly, “ not about that woman.”

“ Unless she was my wife or someone to whom I owe reparation, I care nothing about her. She was perhaps, the merest light o' love ”—the airman shrugged his shoulders—“ I want the cloud lifted from my past. Damn it all, man,” he went on, an unaccustomed note of pleading in his voice, “ it's because I don't know that I can't marry Miss Melrose. Now you know.”

“ What would you give for this information ? ” asked Dermbach, his eyes fixed on the desk.

“ What would I give ? Oh, I might have guessed ! You are out for a deal.” Logan laughed bitterly. “ It can't be such a bad past, after all, else you would have come to me before and asked what I would pay for your silence. Well, name your price.”

“ My price is—the use of that desk and all it contains for the next twenty minutes.”

The men stared at each other across the table. Logan emitted a low whistle. “ So that's it,” he said, a smile playing about his lips, “ you are an English spy. I thought you were a journalist.”

“ No, I am a patriot.”

Logan contemplated him, puzzled, angry, and

amused : " I must have been a very different man in the past from what I am now," he remarked, " to encourage you to make me such a proposal."

" I advise you to consider it," said Dermbach, extracting a cigar from his own case.

" You are aware, I suppose, that if I touch that bell, within twenty minutes you will be lodged in the city gaol."

" I don't think you will do that. This is a private transaction between gentlemen. You know now that I am not a newspaper man out to make a few halfpence, as you correctly put it, but a man who is taking grave risks for the sake of his country. Frankly, I did not suppose you would accept my proposition—not at first. I should like to remove this obstacle to your union with Miss Melrose—for her sake as well as your own ; but this secret is a lever which I may use for the advantage of my country, and I hope it may prove effective yet."

There was no longer any trace of agitation or anger in the manner of either man. " I think you may hold that lever till your hand is glued to it," said the airman ; " I value my present more than my past. I seem to be always up against you patriots on this side "—he smiled. " I'm real glad I'm not a patriot. Apparently, a patriot does his duty by tempting other men to forget theirs."

" True," mused Dermbach. " Cavour said the same thing—' If we did for our own sake what we are doing for the sake of Italy, we should be infernal scoundrels.' "

" I find this quite interesting, Mr. Britisher," resumed Logan, standing with his back to the fire. " It seems this game is going on all over Europe. Respectable Christian Governments annually spend large sums in order to corrupt each other's servants (by the way,

I think there is a law against that sort of thing in commerce), and, moreover, when a spy is caught, the Government for which he has risked his life promptly repudiates him."

"That is so."

"And then these enormous armaments. And war—I have seen war. God! I shan't forget those horses in Cuba—left to lie on the field for days, their hoofs torn off, their bowels hanging out, till the ants finished them. It's a beastly business, war. What's the object of all this? What are you fighting each other for?"

"To maintain our independence."

Logan laughed. "In most countries the independence of the nation is purchased at the cost of the independence of the individuals composing it. You might as well get convicts to fight for the independent existence of their particular gaol!"

"Englishmen do not look upon their country as a gaol," said Dermbach coldly.

"No; the conditions of life for hundreds of thousands of them are worse than those obtaining in any gaol. At least so I have read."

"Have a care, sir," snarled the spy, "you may be English yourself."

He bit his lip, realizing his indiscretion, but the full import of his words was not lost on his adversary.

"Thanks for the clue," Logan bowed derisively. "I'll make a note of that. You may thank your stars that I'm not a German patriot at any rate, or it would be my duty to hand you over to the authorities. As it is, I give you twenty-four hours to quit the country. At this precise hour to-morrow night I shall make a certain communication to the police. The interview is at an end."

Dermbach took up his hat and cane and moved

towards the door. "If at any time you reconsider your decision," he said, "an advertisement in the *Times*, addressed to 'Luxor' will find me. I wish I could have helped you. Good-night."

He closed the door softly behind him. Logan heard the lift gates open and shut. Then returning to his place before the fire, he stared into space, thinking hard. Yes, he was convinced that if any crime could have been laid to his charge, the spy would have asked him for the price of silence, not of speech. And that unguarded reference to his nationality. He was English then. Very well; if this Englishman knew who he was, other Englishmen might know also. Rhona, too, had implored him never to set foot in England. He set his lips firmly together; the cast of his resolute features became a trifle grim. He would go to England and fathom the mystery, let his antecedents be what they might. The London Press, he said to himself with an ugly smile, was fond of dragging the skeletons out of people's cupboards—he would use it to discover his.

CHAPTER XXII

THE announcement telegraphed by the Frankfort correspondent of the *Morning Post*, that the famous airman would shortly visit England for the first time, created a mild sensation in Fleet Street. There is always a dearth of news immediately after Christmas, and Logan was practically virgin soil for the interviewer. One or two papers even prepared their readers for his coming by speculations as to its object, and by dark hints that he came on behalf of the German Government to spy out the weakness of our aerial defences. The Tory Press saw plenty of party capital in his visit—paragraphs condemning the Government for having failed to secure the flying man's services were already set up ready to tack on to the report of the interview. There was not the least secrecy about the visitor's plans. He had booked rooms at the Cecil, and was evidently prepared to receive the squadrons of Fleet Street. All that was uncertain was whether he would come by land or by air, and the precise day of his arrival.

Thanks to his reticence on these points, Logan reached Victoria Station apparently unremarked. The reporters were watching the Cecil. But the wheels of his cab had hardly made a revolution when a lanky, red-haired girl jumped on to the step and with every sign of agitation implored him to give her a lift as far as the Strand. "I haven't a penny," she

sobbed, "and they are after me. Please let me in!"

With the chivalrous instincts characteristic of the American section of the Anglo-Saxon world, the airman opened the door of the cab and drew the girl in. He motioned the driver to go on. "Who is after you?" he asked in great astonishment, "the police? I shan't give you up if they are."

The girl wiped her eyes. Logan could not see any trace of tears. "Well, I saw a hospital nurse on the platform," she faltered, "I thought she might be a White Slave trader. I've been reading such awful things. But—you're Mr. Logan, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am. What journal do you represent?"

Out came the note-book. "I'm Mollie Fitzroy, free lance. They have edged me out of all regular jobs because I'm a suffragette. You see, the mob don't like us, and the newspapers are frightened of the mob. So I took this means of stealing a march on the regular reporters and getting a shot at you first of all. You don't mind, do you?"

Logan was amused. He liked the girl's adroitness and liked her better still for fighting for her sex's emancipation. He detested the Press. If he must make use of it, he preferred to deal with one of its irregulars.

"Is it any particular advantage to you," he enquired good-humouredly, "to have the first interview with me?"

"Great Scott! I should think so! Especially if you didn't give any of the others a chance till to-morrow. It would be my scoop then. There's a crowd waiting for you at the Cecil, you know."

"Well, I'm tired, and I guess I'd rather talk to you than to that crush." He spoke to the driver through

the tube and altered his destination from the Cecil to a quiet hotel in Dover Street, which a German friend had once recommended.

" You must dine with me, Miss Fitzroy," he said. " Then I'll answer any questions you may address me—those that I care to answer. Meantime, I want to talk to you. What made you pounce on me like this ? "

" Well, you see," said Mollie, reluctantly closing her notebook, " I had heard you always travelled by the Queenborough route, so I watched Victoria, and I was promised an introduction to you months ago—"

" Who by ? "

" By Miss Melrose. Hasn't she ever spoken of me ? She came over to Georgina Terrace where I live, to enquire about that woman in her father's case."

It was a sharp twinge. " Yes, I remember she told me something about that inquiry in one of her letters," he said carelessly. " Did anything come of it ? "

" A lot might have come of it if they had let me follow it up." Mollie could not suppress a note of indignation, " I identified the woman from a portrait in Miss Melrose's possession, and then I struck a trail and—"

Logan felt his interest in the case revive. He was curious to learn how the clues which he had obtained had resulted.

" But how did Miss Melrose get hold of a portrait of this woman ? " he asked, as the taxi dodged a motorbus, and successfully rounded Hyde Park Corner. " We simply knew that letters were addressed to a Miss de Salta at some place in Chelsea."

" Yes, but the queer thing is that Miss Melrose had this woman's photograph in her possession all the time without knowing who she was. When I say all the

time, I mean that it had been given her or lent to her by a friend who also didn't know whose it was——”

“ Did you ever see this photograph ? ” Logan asked very quickly. “ What was the woman like ? ”

“ Oh, a very striking person—dark, long black hair, etc. My landlady recognised her at once, though in the photo she wore rather scantier attire than is usual. She must have been taken by a fashionable Bond Street photographer.”

“ In fact, it was this photograph you saw ? ” said the airman calmly. He held the well-thumbed slip in the light of the lamp.

“ Yes, that's the one. How did you . . . Oh, here we are ! ”

Mollie, tremulous and exultant, waited and fidgeted in the drawing-room of the little hotel, while Logan changed from his travelling suit. He had ordered dinner to be prepared in a private sitting-room, so she was not troubled by the consciousness of her worn serge costume. He obstinately refused to be interviewed, as he put it, during the progress of the meal. He made Mollie talk instead and was highly diverted by the recital of her escapades and shifts for a living. Her determined efforts to force her way into the House of Commons greatly interested him, and he listened with respectful sympathy to her light-hearted account of her experiences at Holloway. Incidentally, he compared the young gentlemen so prominent in the opposition to the suffrage movement, to the Yahoos of Gulliver's story, and the mean whites who dance round roasted negroes in the Southern States.

“ Now,” he said, as the cigarettes and liqueurs were placed before them, “ go ahead with your cross-examination. And don't expect me to tell you too much.”

"Where was I raised? Well, now, that's important. . . . Put this; 'Mr. Logan's active career began on the island of Palmiste. He was one of the few survivors of the great eruption of 1898. He is not, however, a native of the island, but is a citizen of the United States.' "

"Rather vague, isn't it?" interrupted Mollie. "Can't you tell me where you were born?"

"Put just that. As to my age, say just what you take me to be. You must publish my photograph mind—I'm most anxious about that. I am particularly vain about my personal appearance. . . . What do I think about England? Well, I hope its better than it's represented by its Press, and that it deserves better institutions than it's got. . . . What do I think about the suffrage movement? Why, I've told you. . . . You don't care to print all that? No. . . . very well. What do I have for breakfast? Some solid and some liquid refreshment most times, occasionally only one or the other. . . . Why am I here just now? To see the Lord Mayor in his coach drawn by six white mice—or is that the King when he opens Parliament? . . . And there's no pumpkin? Well, well Yes, go ahead . . . I'm not tired."

He leaned with one elbow on the table, his knees crossed, blowing smoke rings into the air, and parrying the girl's eager indiscreet questions with answers, true as often as he could safely allow, more often frankly ironical or intriguing. All the while he was impatient to get done with this fooling, to interrogate his questioner as to this amazing and vital discovery of the identity of the woman who constituted the sole link with his past.

Mollie glanced at the clock, closed her book with a snap, and rose to go. "I must get this in at once,"

she said excitedly, "it's the greatest scoop of my life. . . . And the photograph—thanks frightfully. This means a lot to me you know. If I can do anything for you, let me know."

"You can do a whole lot for me, I guess, Miss Fitzroy," he said gravely. "If you are really grateful, I'll ask you to lunch here with me to-morrow at one o'clock. I have a good deal to say to you, which must be said at once."

"Right-ho!" Mollie looked puzzled, but pleased.

Three minutes later she was driving towards Fleet Street, snapping her thin fingers and gloating over her notes. As she recognised a group of journalists hanging about the courtyard of the Cecil, she uttered a derisive yell.

Logan was reading the report of the interview when she presented herself at the hotel, next day. His account of himself was given faithfully enough, but a tactful sub-editor had of course suppressed those irrelevant expressions of sympathy with an unpopular cause, which are so offensive to our liberty-loving and sportsmanlike people. "That's always so," Mollie explained. "In the same way if a paper gets a hundred letters condemning its policy, and two in favour, they exclude the hundred and publish the two as expressions of public opinion. I've done awfully well out of that scoop," she added exultingly. "Thanks to you." And then he noticed that she was quite expensively clad in a black velvet coat, and carried a preposterous flat muff.

"When you go to the Cecil, you'll have the whole gang after you," she warned him, as she laid aside these adornments, preparatory to lunch.

"Look here," he said, when the meal was finished, "it's in your power to do me a tremendous service.

You will if you can? . . . Thanks. Well, first of all, have you seen Miss Melrose lately?"

"Not for two months. Her lawyer, Raines, came to see me, or rather my landlady, and we didn't seem to hit it off together. Miss Melrose had promised to let me help her with this case, but I fancy this pig of a lawyer must have put her off it. I went off to Scotland, and when I called at Longridge Road I heard that she and her aunt had gone into the country. They have promised to let me know when her father's case will be re-heard, and that's when I suppose I shall hear from her."

Logan was disappointed. He was thirsting for news of Rhona. Even to have heard how she was looking would have been a crumb of consolation. He stifled a sigh.

"Well," he said, "to get to business. You tell me that your landlady identified the original of this photograph"—he laid it on the table beside him—"as Miss de Salta, the go-between in this spy case. I want you to tell me all you have heard about her."

Mollie hesitated. After all, she was no longer in Rhona's service and she felt she liked this man immensely. Besides he had laid her under a heavy obligation. Vigorously puffing at her cigarette and trying in vain to blow rings, she repeated all that Juliana could remember about her beautiful lodger.

Logan listened with intense interest, half dreading, half hoping that the narrative might release some secret spring of memory, might at some point stir his dormant recollection. No, it sounded all absolutely fresh. He drew a deep breath.

"And do I understand you to say that you are in a position to trace this woman's whereabouts?" he asked looking at the girl keenly.

"Yes, I'll tell you how." She told him of her chance recognition of Miss de Salta's features on the screen at the cinematograph show, and mentioned the address of the film makers—Boudin Frères, Avenue du Maine, Paris.

"Mind you," concluded Mollie, "I feel a bit mean telling you all this, because Miss Melrose said she didn't want this woman produced, as it might be a shock or something to somebody she cared for. I suppose that isn't you?" She shot a glance of enquiry at her companion.

"On the contrary, Miss Melrose and I are hardly acquainted at present." The man's tone was dry and harsh. He replaced the photograph in his pocket. looked at the clock, and seemed to make some mental calculations. He called for a Bradshaw and found the page he wanted with an ease which Mollie could not too much admire. "I just hate to hustle you," he said, glancing up at her, "but I want to catch the 2.20 to Paris. Do you care to drive with me to the station? We can talk on the way."

Mollie delightedly assented. Like most London girls she would have been content to spend the whole day driving in a taxi, especially with a well-groomed man at her side. She was immensely interested in Logan and frenziedly curious as to his connection with the Melrose case. "I'll explain it all to you later," he promised her, "and I appoint you my sole press agent for the United Kingdom, if you think there's any money to be made out of me. I want you to get my photograph in as many journals as possible on this side, and to keep me posted as to the progress of the Melrose case. You have my word for it that I am on Miss Melrose's side. Write to me at the American Express Company at Paris."

"Talking about your photograph," said the journalist, "I forgot to tell you that Raines showed it to Mrs. Gulf and asked her if she remembered it. She said you did vaguely remind her of someone—but it might have been of the policeman on the next beat! He is rather like you, by the way. But the odd thing is that this must have been a photo taken of you ten or twelve years ago. He didn't say it was yours. I've only just recognised you by it. Did you ever know Mr. Raines?"

Logan shook his head. In the train he set to work to fit together all the pieces in the puzzle. It was clear that the lawyer had known him in the past, and that he was mixed up with the very woman who had so largely contributed to the ruin of Rhona's father. This then was why she had thrown him over. It was out of kindness that she had refused to give him her reasons. The same motives of generosity might even have restrained Dermbach. Was it possible that half Europe knew him for a scoundrel and forbore to dispel his blissful unconsciousness? He was tempted for the merest instant to cancel his instructions to Mollie and abandon the search after his lost identity. But he certainly could not be worse than living on a mine which might explode at any moment. "I'll go through with it," he muttered, "though I turn out to be Judas Iscariot."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE establishment of Messrs. Boudin Frères he found to be an unprepossessing building in a broad third-class thoroughfare. On asking to see the manager he was admitted into a comfortable waiting-room. He went to the window and looked out into a vast yard. An astonishing sight met his gaze. An unfortunate man was running backwards and forwards, followed by a long train of persons of both sexes and all sorts and conditions. As he ran he met with every conceivable mishap. Sacks of flour were emptied over him, he tumbled over buckets, he collided with policemen. Logan watched the panorama with amusement till he was aroused by the entrance of the manager, a dumpy little Frenchman in an alpaca coat.

“ You wish to see me ? ” he said in English, fingering the aviator’s card. “ Is it possible that I have the honour to speak to Mr. Logan, the great aviator ? ”

“ I am Logan the flying man, sir. I will trespass on your courtesy so far as to ask you to assist me to trace the original of the heroine of this drama.” He handed the director the particulars written on a card. “ I knew the lady many years ago,” he explained, “ and private circumstances make it very desirable that I should find her.”

“ I will do all that which I can, Mister Logan. Will you give yourself the pain to seat yourself ? ”

It seemed a long time before the little man reappeared. He consulted a paper he held in his hand.

"The lady whom you research called herself Mlle. Salvany," he announced. "She was of the troupe of M. Mengelle, who, by the most great of hazards, finds himself at this moment here at the Theatre Montparnasse. It is all near from here. Wish you that I there conduct you?"

Mr. Logan wished it very much. Expressing in his curious English his profound regret that he had never been able to witness any of Mr. Logan's flying feats, the director escorted him across the avenue into the Rue de la Gaité. The airman noticed that almost every house on one side of the mean little street was a place of entertainment of some sort.

"M. Mengelle is a brave man," said their conductor, encouragingly. "You will be well received." For a moment Logan wondered what M. Mengelle's courage had to do with it, when he realised that the director used the word "brave" in the French sense.

They halted before a shabby-looking theatre which he rightly judged from the coloured posters displayed outside to be devoted to melodrama of the lurid sensational type. The director left him in the vestibule and presently returned in the company of a rather good-looking man on whose features "strolling player" was written very legibly.

"Hélas! the bad news!" began the cinematograph man, shrugging his shoulders and waving his hands.

"You will be desolated. Calm you, I pray you of it!"

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Logan, "is the lady dead?" At that moment he would have rejoiced to hear she was.

"Dead, no. M. Mengelle here, cannot tell you very much. She is now—hélas—at the House of Fools."

For a moment the airman thought this was a reference to the Chamber of Deputies or the British House of Commons. "Where?" he asked blankly.

"At the—what you call it—at the mad asylum."

Logan was startled. "Well," he said deliberately, taking a chair, "I'd like to hear all about her if your friend will be so kind."

"It must be that I quit you, mister," said the fat man bowing apologetically, "M. Mengelle will say the history of your friend."

"Do you understand French, Monsieur?" asked the actor-manager in his own language.

"Yes, if you speak very slowly and distinctly."

"It is my métier to talk distinctly. I thank you." M. Mengelle accepted a cigar which he contemplated for some seconds with admiration and then lit almost reverentially. He seated himself opposite Logan. "Tell me by what name did you know this poor lady?"

"As Miss de Salta."

"You don't know whether that is her real name? No, you do not. I knew her only as Mlle. Salvany. She said she was a Spaniard. She came to me when I was with my troupe at Bordeaux two years ago. She implored me to engage her. She said she was very poor, and had once been an actress of repute. As the result, however, of deep affliction, she had for a short time been confined in a lunatic asylum, and on being discharged could get no employment. She begged me to give her a chance. It was a risky thing to do." M. Mengelle shrugged his shoulders. "But I was sorry for her, and she was a very handsome woman. Well, I gave her a small part, and she travelled round with us. She was not popular with the troupe. She was very reserved, and was never seen to smile except on

the stage. Her temper was decidedly dangerous, and her fellow-artists gave her a wide berth. I asked her why she did not return to her friends in Spain, and she said that they had cast her off. The ladies of my company declared that she had been jilted by some lover or abandoned by her husband.

“ I had nothing to complain of for about six months. Then she suddenly stopped short in her part and began to talk incoherently. I had to pull her off the stage. She assured me that this was a passing aberration and could not occur again ; but, of course, I took no chances. But I could not let her starve, so I introduced a new feature into my programme. She danced the dances of her country in the entr’actes. She danced divinely, and I was able to pay her a hundred francs a week, so powerful an attraction did she prove. So we went on for about three months. Then a strange thing happened. In one of her dances she used a thin sword blade, as the harlequin uses a wand. One night she happened to snap this blade in two. The effect was electric. She shrieked : ‘ He will pierce my heart with his broken sword ! ’ and went into a fit. I rang down the curtain.

“ It was evident that she was insane, but was harmless and quiet unless deliberately irritated. I did not know what to do with her, but I brought her on with us here to Paris. Luckily at that time my good friend at Boudin’s asked me to arrange a series of dramas in dumb show for the cinematograph. In these representations, of course, poor Mlle. Salvany could be trusted to take part. You appear to have seen her only in the ‘ King’s Revenge.’ I wonder at that, for she has posed for half the cinema plays produced in Europe. Well, that continued till about a year ago. Then the final tragedy occurred.”

M. Mengelle shook his head sadly. "We were playing 'The Mysteries of the Underground Railway' at this very theatre. You have never seen that drama? It is superb. It shows your great city of London in all its enormity—its glitter, its sombreness. Your friend was watching the play from the wings. In the third act I enter in the uniform of a general in the British artillery. I had procured that uniform from London at enormous expense. The effect on the audience was very nearly spoiled by Mlle. Salvany. She screamed at the sight of me, imagined that I was pursuing her and fell at last into a swoon.

"When she recovered consciousness she did not appear to recognise anyone. She was pronounced to be insane. She was not quite destitute. We searched her lodgings and found that she had saved the great proportion of her earnings. In addition, I gave a benefit for her, and the students of the Quartier subscribed generously to a fund I opened on her behalf. In the end she was sent not to Ville Evrard, where the pauper lunatics go, but to the great state asylum at Charenton.

"She is there now. She is sullen and never smiles or utters a word, but she gives no trouble, and is not accounted dangerous. A sad end to a beautiful woman and a talented artiste, is it not? I fear you must be sadly disappointed to find your old friend in this state."

Thanks to the actor's trained enunciation, the airman had not missed a word of the narrative. He listened with increasing bewilderment. Spaniards? Bordeaux? What had he to do with the people or the place? But he understood well enough the significance of the broken sword.

"I'm very much obliged to you, sir," he said to the

actor. "Now can you tell me how it is possible to get an interview with this afflicted lady?"

M. Mengelle advised him to apply direct to the superintendent of the asylum. He expressed his pleasure at having been of any service to the distinguished Mr. Logan. He hoped that Mr. Logan would one day place his genius and daring at the service of France, which alone of all countries knew how to appreciate them. Mr. Logan said that within a year or two he would be glad to consider an offer from the government of the Republic. He complimented M. Mengelle on the magnificent feats of his own countrymen. M. Mengelle blushed as if he was personally responsible for them and hoped that Mr. Logan would accept a box at that theatre for the evening performance. Nothing, said Mr. Logan, would give him greater pleasure, but unfortunately he had to be with the Marquis of Carabas that evening. He hoped M. Mengelle would lunch with him at any place he might choose the next day. M. Mengelle promptly proposed the *Café de la Paix*. Having shaken hands four separate times and pressed another cigar on the actor's acceptance, the airman at last sidled out into the street.

He walked as far as the Montparnasse station before he found an "auto." After promising the driver an extra tip for the length of the journey, he directed him to drive to the National Asylum. It was a long run, during which he had ample time to estimate the tremendous importance to him of his confrontation with the mad woman. Within an hour the whole of his past might be laid bare before him. He might find himself irrevocably sundered from Rhona, nay from all honest men, by a gulf which the lava stream had filled in vain. Bracing himself as when he had climbed into the seat of some new and untested aeroplane for a risky flight,

and with perhaps the same quickening of the pulse, he crossed the wide inner court of the vast building and entered the secretary's office.

In his schoolboy French, he stated his name and business, adding that as a stranger he must be excused if he had overlooked any necessary formalities.

The secretary glanced carelessly at his card and then turned up a register. "Salvany, you said—Mlle. Angustia Salvany—was it not so?" he added, glancing up from the book.

"Yes."

"You are too late. She was discharged from the asylum ten days ago. Her address is 200, Rue de la Grande Chaumière." He then shut the book with a snap.

Logan hurried out into the road. No cab was in sight here, outside the fortifications. At the porter's advice he made his way to the riverside, and took passage on the little steamer to the Pont St. Michel. Cursing the fewness of horseless vehicles in Paris, he was then driven with what seemed insufferable slowness up the interminable Boule' Miche' and along the gloomy streets of the Luxembourg quarter to very near the point whence he had set out two hours before.

Number 200, Rue de la Grande Chaumière, was a tiny dilapidated-looking hotel, chiefly frequented, Logan surmised, by the *cabotin* class. A pretty woman, about forty, obviously an actress *en retraite*, replied to his enquiries. "Mademoiselle Salvany? But monsieur is most unfortunate! She departed only this morning very suddenly. It was, Jules said, as if she had seen something in the morning's paper which had interested her. No; she left no address. She received no visits and hardly left her room all day."

A few other questions elicited no further information o

the least value. With a heavy heart, Logan turned away and walked in what he supposed was the direction of the river. As a last resort, he decided to call upon M. Mengelle again in the faint hope that the missing woman might report herself to her benefactor. In the Rue Vavin it occurred to him to buy a paper. Almost the first paragraph that caught his eye was headed : "Disaster to Germany. Airship secretly building destroyed by explosion near Frankfort. Suspected action by foreign agents."

"Miss de Salta and everybody else must wait!" was the airman's thought as he crammed the paper into his pocket and looked round wildly for a cab, "This is Dermbach's work."

Four hours later he was watching the plains of Champagne fly past him as the train bore him towards the Rhine. He turned once more to the newspaper and read that the Melrose case was to be re-tried a week later.

CHAPTER XXIV

RHONA and Miss Netherby lingered at Torquay till the middle of December. There was nothing wrong with the girl's health, but she caused her aunt profound anxiety. She had sunk into a state of apathy from which it seemed impossible to rouse her. She presented a pitiful contrast to her former spirited, vivacious self. She appeared to be plunged into a never-ending reverie. Left to herself, she would sit idly gazing before her, brooding, brooding. She seldom spoke unless she was first spoken to, and then seemed to have some difficulty in fixing her attention on what was said. Often when she had begun to read she would let the book fall to the floor and resume her meditations. Sometimes she seemed to be shaken by a spasm of mental anguish and would clench her hands or rise with a gesture of impatience. She loved to be alone, and spent hours wandering along the sea shore or over the Devon hills.

Miss Netherby took counsel with doctors and devised new schemes of distraction every day. Rhona made no opposition, but her aunt's efforts clearly caused her only pain and weariness. So long as the conversation turned on matters unconnected with herself she would strive to take her share in it, though in dull and mechanical tones. But at the most indirect reference to her mood or the condition of her health she displayed irritation and became more taciturn than ever.

Nevertheless, her aunt at last attempted a direct appeal. "Look here, Rhona," she said one morning. "You must be aware that you are lapsing into a state of chronic melancholia. Within a few weeks' time the task to which you vowed yourself will be accomplished and England will be hastening to make all possible reparation to your father's memory. Surely that is something to live for, something to hope for. Pull yourself together, as a soldier's daughter should. Dismiss the past as a bad nightmare and try to think about others beside yourself. You cannot suppose your life is finished at twenty-one."

The girl acknowledged her aunt's admonition only by an imploring gesture, but it was not lost upon her. Almost immediately she developed a feverish passion for excitement and gaiety of all kinds. Whatever distractions the sedate watering-place offered she eagerly patronised. She secured an invitation to the county ball ; she danced with naval officers at Plymouth, with military officers at Exeter. Her animation was plainly forced and unnatural, but her aunt would have welcomed any change, short of insanity, from her previous mood. But Rhona forced the pace to such an extent that a breakdown seemed imminent. As the approach of Christmas was heralded by an ever-increasing stir and bustle of preparation, she was prevailed upon to start for their long-promised visit to Owen Raines in Monmouthshire.

Fair Oaks, the lawyer's seat, lay in very beautiful country five or six miles from Chepstow, within sound of the Severn sea. Parts of the house dated from the reign of the first James, but the pile had been enlarged and rather recklessly added to by successive owners, especially within the last century. The older portions were solid and dignified; but so unpretending as to

suggest that they had been built, not by county magnates, but by gentlemen farmers of steadily increasing fortune.

The house stood in the middle of a large park thickly studded with the trees from which the estate took its name. As the ladies drove up the long avenue Rhona looked around with unwonted interest and pleasure. Such surroundings were new to the girl who had spent the last thirteen years on the Continent. "What a delightful place!" she remarked to her companion.

"Yes," said Miss Netherby, pleased at this unfeigned interest. "And Mr. Raines deserves it, too. He's a kind-hearted, chivalrous man and a very able lawyer."

Mr. Raines stood at the door of his house to welcome them. He looked at Rhona with an expression of subdued sympathy, as if noting her hollow cheeks and diminished colour, but he spared her any direct inquiries or allusions to her health. For this she was disposed to forgive him even the elderly, over-dressed cousin whom he introduced to them as their hostess. Her room, she found, was the cosiest and handsomest she had ever occupied. Certainly Mr. Raines had spared no pains to make her visit enjoyable. She felt her interest in life returning, if only in its externals and creature comforts. She dressed with a conscious desire to impress her fellow-guests, whoever they might be. As she surveyed herself in the mirror when the dinner gong sounded she resolved to shake off care and to banish the past from her thoughts. "I must get over it," she said to herself. "It's a shameful memory, which deserves to be forgotten."

She was glad the trees were bare. She never heard the wind stirring the leaves without recalling that August night in the woods near Biebrich.

It was not a large party that the solicitor had gathered together to spend Christmas under his roof. The guests, Rhona was a little surprised to find, were all Londoners. Four of the men were lawyers, two dark-eyed gentlemen with very wide waistcoats she instinctively classified as financiers. A long-haired, wild-eyed person, with a great deal of throat showing, turned out to be Picklewicki, the violinist. One of the ladies was the wife of one of the financiers, another was the wife of a barrister, a third, thanks to the display of her charms on picture-postcards, Rhona recognised at once as Muriel Gay, the musical comedy actress. Excepting the violinist, they were all types unfamiliar to Miss Netherby and her niece, but Rhona was thoroughly prepared to like them.

Owen Raines himself appeared to delegate all a host's duties to his cousin—the woman that Rhona could not bring herself to like—and became simply one of a party of jolly good fellows, bent on enjoying themselves and giving the ladies a good time. Thus he was enabled to devote himself almost exclusively to Rhona, while taking care to see that it was her tastes that should be consulted in all the arrangements. Being made aware in good time of her objection to hunting and shooting, he assured his men guests that no sport was to be had on his estate at that time of year, and was discreetly silent as to his own performances with the gun. He was abundantly endowed with the lawyer's gift of anecdote, but threw off all the gravity sometimes associated with his profession. He never alluded to the case he had in hand, except by a vague and encouraging allusion to "our approaching triumph." He was full of stories of his adventures in Spain and other remoter countries, especially when he was alone with Rhona, being unmistakably anxious to represent himself in a

more romantic and picturesque light than that which usually falls upon the prosperous lawyer.

The morning after her arrival Rhona expressed a desire to be conducted over the house. Raines delightedly sent for the housekeeper's keys, and they set off on their pilgrimage. At the foot of the stairs they met Miss Gay. She at once put her arm in Rhona's, thereby intimating her intention of accompanying them. Though Mr. Raines had assiduously courted the actress' attention in the past, at the present moment he wished that she had stayed in bed half an hour longer.

"What a beautiful old place!" exclaimed Rhona as they came out on to the terrace. "I wonder, Mr. Raines, that you don't always spend the vacation here, instead of travelling. Your profession keeping you so much in London, you can hardly have any time for your own home."

"But the beautiful old place is very lonely, you forget that," said the lawyer, in a tone meant only for Rhona's ear. Perhaps Miss Gay overheard it, for she glanced curiously from one to the other and then smiled a trifle sardonically.

"What are those for?" she asked, pointing to three Tritons carved in stone which uplifted their wreathed horns at the far end of a basin. "Do they blow a blast if you put a penny in the slot or sprinkle you with lavender water?"

"They would probably sprinkle you with very dirty water," said Raines, "if anyone knew how they are worked. It is a fountain worked by a spring, the whereabouts of which everybody has forgotten. As you may suppose, I don't think it worth while to dig up the whole terrace to find it."

They re-entered the house. With a great deal of the big, rambling pile Rhona was disappointed. Too much

of it was overlaid with work of the last five or six years, good in itself perhaps, but destructive of the charm which belongs to a house made not for one, but many, generations. Raines proudly exhibited his spoils of travel, curios he had picked up here and there, portraits of eminent contemporaries. Even the sporting prints, of which he was so fond, related to events within his own lifetime. It seemed as if he had been anxious to remove all traces of his predecessors.

"This looks interesting," remarked Miss Gay, tapping a stout oaken door. "Is this the entrance to the dungeons?"

"That—oh, that's the old portrait gallery," explained Raines carelessly. "Would you like to see it?"

He fumbled with the bunch of keys, and had already selected one when his eye fell upon Rhona. He stared at her for an appreciable moment, changed colour, and resumed his fumbling with the keys.

"Well, that's a funny thing," he said, "I can't find the key to the gallery."

"But you had it in your hand just this minute," said Rhona.

"No, I was mistaken. That's another key altogether. But it doesn't matter. I will show it to you another time. You haven't missed much. There are only a few portraits there, all recent, by obscure artists. In fact, I think I shall turn the gallery into a bowling alley."

They passed on. "He probably sold all the family portraits," whispered Miss Gay to Rhona, "at the same time he came into the estates."

The remark perplexed Rhona, for she had assumed that the property had descended to the present owner from his ancestors, and if, on the other hand, he had

bought it, it did not seem probable that he would be under the necessity of selling the family portraits.

The time passed swiftly at Fair Oaks. The days were devoted to long excursions by motor-car to the beautiful spots in the Wye Valley—to Tintern, Symond's Yat and Ross, even to distant Hereford, into the dark defiles of the Breconshire Beacons. Returning after dusk, the more energetic members of the party occupied themselves with bridge and billiards. Rhona, delightfully tired, loved to abandon herself to the spell of the great violinist. In his music she lived over again sensations and memories which she did not dare to recall more specifically. For Picklewicki himself she conceived a great liking, of which her host did not scruple to show himself jealous. From time to time she became conscious of the solicitor's extremely proprietary air, and noticed that the other men drew away from her whenever he approached. This irritated her, and she complained to Miss Netherby.

"Mr. Raines behaves as if I were engaged to him," she observed. "It puts me in a very awkward position."

"My dear child," replied her aunt, "I can see nothing in his conduct which you could possibly complain of. He certainly likes you, which is just as well for us. Moreover, he has incurred great trouble, even danger, perhaps, on your behalf, so you might extend to him a little more consideration than to other people."

Thus rebuffed by her aunt, and not wishing to offend Raines, whom she genuinely liked, Rhona affected the society of Muriel Gay. That volatile comedienne professed herself bored at Fair Oaks. "There are not enough of us," she observed, as they started on a long tramp towards the Wye, "and old Owen plays the respectable a bit too thoroughly down here. For all

that, he doesn't get any of his neighbours to call on him, as you must have noticed. Why doesn't he take us round to see the other house parties?"

"Perhaps his neighbours are not interesting," suggested Rhona. "I gathered from the way you talk that Mr. Raines leads a fairly gay life, and I can easily imagine that the Monmouthshire bumpkins wouldn't be much company for him."

Miss Gay demurred to this contemptuous dismissal of Mr. Raines' neighbours. "In point of fact," she said, "old Lord Belfoy over there"—she pointed towards a mansion dimly discernible in the distance—"is entertaining one of the jolliest crowds you could get together. However, I'm not grumbling. Old Owen is a very good sort and doesn't deserve to be cut by his neighbours."

"But why should they cut him?"

"My dear girl, I don't know. It all happened in my school days. They didn't like the way he got hold of the estate, I suppose."

"You interest me immensely," said Rhona. "How did he get hold of the estate?"

Miss Gay looked a little perplexed. "I don't know precisely. The last owner was a fiery old bachelor, with a beast of a temper, a gouty leg and a ne'er-do-well nephew. Then the boy ran away—some say old Owen advised the old man to turn him off. I don't know. The old boy's name was Standring. The boy's was Clive Standring. Those are the *dramatis personæ*. Owen was a distant cousin, belonging to some Welsh branch of the family. Anyhow, after or before the boy disappeared he got round the old man and persuaded him to leave him all the property by will—in trust, as they say, for the young fellow. If Master Clive turns up then Owen will have to quit. But if he had been

alive he would have turned up by now. The uncle died thirteen or fourteen years ago. So I think Owen may be regarded as the lawful owner by this time, and as a safe investment by any designing female."

Rhona flushed at what she knew was, at the best, a good-humoured thrust. "What you tell me is most interesting," she said coldly; "but I should imagine that Mr. Raines, having withstood the fascinations of our loveliest queens of comedy, must be considered immune to the inferior charms of the ordinary match-making type of female."

Miss Gay smiled beneath the counter-stroke, and they walked on in silence for perhaps ten minutes. Then the actress whistled the air of "*Les Cloches de Corneville*." 'When the heir returneth, shall ring the bell.' "I never hear that tune," she remarked, "without thinking of Owen. He gets so fidgety if you play it in his presence. Do you see that public-house at the cross-roads? That is where the missing heir used to go playing bowls and otherwise carrying on. The landlord is the only man on the estate that remembers him, they say; Owen can't get rid of him, because he's got a twenty-one years' lease. Poor old Owen! I oughtn't to give him away like this. But, after all, the boy's probably dead, and unless he married and left children Owen is rightful owner all right. It's coming on to rain—and not a taxi within two hundred miles of us!"

CHAPTER XXV

AT the New Year most of Mr. Raines' guests took their leave. Rhona heard with surprise that her aunt had accepted their host's invitation to stay on till the trial, which he assured them was not far distant. She had no choice but to stay on at Fair Oaks also, which she did somewhat reluctantly, attributing her aunt's change of plans to her desire to encourage the lawyer's attentions. She was only partly right. Raines had shown Miss Netherby the papers announcing Logan's visit to London and publishing his portrait. "It's not at all desirable they should meet," he remarked, adding, irritably and nervously, "the man must be a fool to advertise himself in this way. I don't want to drag him into the case, if I can help it." And Miss Netherby agreed, taking care to keep the papers out of her niece's way. As Rhona had not yet contracted the English passion for newspapers, this was not at all difficult. Raines was thus enabled to spring the announcement of the trial upon her at the last possible moment, telegraphing to Miss Netherby to bring her to London on the very eve of the great day.

The re-opening of the Melrose case had been consented to very reluctantly by the Government. Though information had been studiously withheld from the Press till the eleventh hour (when it was imparted with something like a war-whoop by Miss Fitzroy), everyone looked on the quashing of the verdict of the previous

court-martial as inevitable, for it was argued that the authorities would never have allowed the case to be reopened unless they had had pretty strong grounds for believing that a grave miscarriage of justice had occurred. At the same time the outside public had no idea as to whom the guilt might be fastened on in lieu of the dead captain. Everyone was on tiptoe with expectation. The fact that the case was to be reopened at the petition of the dead man's daughter—a beautiful girl of twenty-one—naturally increased public interest tenfold. Yet very few persons not immediately connected with the case had been able to obtain admission to the court. These were mostly members of the Government, some military men of high rank, and the reporters, of whom Mollie was the most conspicuous and active.

She was already in her place, biting her pen with impatience, when Rhona and Miss Netherby came in, followed by Raines, and took their seats at the solicitors' table. Rhona did not display the elation that might have been expected of her. She kept her eyes fixed on the floor, oblivious of the admiring glances directed at her, and seemed wrapt in profound thought. She was far from sharing her friends' elation. She had so often rehearsed this scene in her mind, and always she had pictured Maurice by her side, joining hands with her at the moment of triumph. Now, at any moment in the next two or three hours something might be said which would proclaim him before all Europe a traitor and a dastard, and blast his life for ever ; and it would be his love for her which had resulted in his ruin. Presently the counsel and solicitors' clerks bustled in, and there was a hum of conversation. This was immediately checked when the three judges, all dressed in full uniform and wearing their swords, appeared,

accompanied by a civilian assessor, and took their places at a table covered with the Union Jack.

After some discussion as to the procedure and a good many preliminary formalities, Mr. Benyon, the barrister retained by Raines, rose and opened the case. He began with narrating the history of the crime with which Captain Melrose had been convicted, passing on to the seizure of the letters at the tobacconist's in Wardour Street, and so to the evidence adduced against Melrose at the first court-martial. He showed that Melrose had been convicted on these grounds : that he was possessed of the information betrayed to the foreign power ; that he was in want of money ; and that the treasonable documents were (according to the experts) typed on his machine and annotated in his own handwriting. "Very well," said the counsel tapping the bench before him, "I can prove that there were other officers who could have had access to these secrets, at least one officer in as great need of money, and, finally, that a plan, by its nature treasonable, of all the secret defences of Gibraltar was supplied to a foreign Power in the same handwriting six months after the death of Captain Melrose ! "

He threw the plan on the table before him with a dramatic gesture. It was immediately picked up by Raines and handed up to the judges, by whom it was examined minutely. Attached to it was the certificate under the hand and seal of the Governor of Gibraltar, attesting its date and highly confidential character.

The court rose for luncheon. Rhona had hoped to exchange a word with Mollie, but the girl had disappeared. Mr. Benyon rallied his client on her dejection as they crossed Parliament Street on their way to a restaurant. "I'll bet you what you like in gloves, Miss Melrose," challenged the jolly K.C., "that we get

our verdict before six. These soldiers' notions of evidence and procedure are original, to say the least of it, but their expedition might be imitated to advantage in some other place we know of, eh Raines ? ”

The solicitor answered in the same light strain, but Rhona could see that he was anxious and fidgety. His manner was that of one who dreaded the appearance of some unwished-for person. He and she did little more than listen to and smile at the sallies of Miss Netherby and the counsel.

They might have enjoyed the company of Miss Fitzroy if a note had not been brought in to that vivacious journalist immediately before the court rose. She was not greatly surprised to find that it was from Logan. She had not heard from him since his departure for Paris, but had expected him for some vague reason to put in an appearance at the trial. The note asked her to meet him at once at Charing Cross Hotel.

She found him in the vestibule, evidently awaiting her with the liveliest impatience. He was accompanied by an insignificant foreign-looking man.

“ Look here,” he said in a low earnest tone, drawing her by both hands towards him and his companion. “ You are my friend, aren’t you ? ”—he scanned her face eagerly—“ you are not troubled by an overpowering sense of duty to your Government, are you ? ”

“ Not that I know of,” replied Mollie, somewhat startled by the query, “ you see I’m not a citizen, I’m not even a person. I’m only a woman. Well ? ”

“ Good.” Logan drew her, followed by the other man, to a corner of the room. “ You heard, I suppose, of the destruction of my machine near Frankfort the other day. It’s my life’s work gone ! ” he muttered bitterly—“ Well, not only that is destroyed, but the plans were stolen from that fool of a colleague of mine,

Simborski. He's in gaol, and has confessed that they were taken from him by an English spy called Dermbach. This friend of mine"—he indicated his companion—"is a detective in the German secret service. He has tracked Dermbach over here, and believes that he has not yet sold the plans to your people here. Now we have just found out from the servants here and the cabman that the scoundrel went down to assist at the Melrose trial. I telegraphed you at Georgina Terrace, and heard that you were there. Can you squeeze one of us in somehow?"

Mollie looked from one man to the other. "You don't propose to shoot him, do you?" she asked doubtfully.

"No, no, of course not! If we can get hold of him, we will try to buy the papers back, and if not my friend has got a warrant to arrest him—the warrant's really for another man, but it will enable us to detain him. Can't you get us in as reporters—or one of us?"

Mollie considered. "Well, you had better leave your friend here outside the building, and I'll see if I can get them to pass you in as an American correspondent. I'm not hopeful though. But the court won't sit again for a full hour, so you can give me some lunch."

Miss Fitzroy, owing to the hurry of her departure from Whitehall, had fallen into an error. The court reassembled half-an-hour after her meeting with Logan, and Rhona, already in her place, noted the girl journalist's absence with surprise. Surprise was changed to astonishment when, as the judges resumed their seats, a fat, elderly woman forced her way to the front of the court, panting and complaining most loudly, and followed by a woman of striking appearance, in a thick black veil and wide-brimmed hat.

"Oh, if you please, my lords and gentlemen," cried

the stout dame, curtseying to the president, "I'm Mrs. Juliana Gulf, well known to Miss Mollie Fitzroy, here in court"—she looked round, surprised not to see her head lodger—"and this 'ere is Miss de Salta, who once lodged with us, and is come to tell you 'ow pore Captain Melrose was as innocent as a babe unborn, and 'ow you ought to be ashamed of yourselves for what you've done, and 'ow Miss de Salta herself took the letters—"

"Silence, madam!" roared the general presiding, a choleric Indian veteran, rising to his feet. "What the devil do you mean, breaking into court in this way?"

"Yes, sir, I'm very sorry, but you don't understand. This is Miss de Salta—"

Mr. Benyon leaped to his feet. "With the permission of the honourable court, I will call Miss de Salta as a witness!"

"No, no," whispered Rhona, but the advocate concerned only for his dead client, welcomed in the strange woman only a friendly witness.

"Very well, sir," assented the president, "call her if you like, and make that other woman sit down. It's scandalous the guard should have admitted her."

Mrs. Gulf forced her way in among the reporters, in spite of their protests. Miss de Salta stood as if dazed till an official guided her to the witness box. She threw back her veil. Rhona leaned forward and gazed fascinated at the original of the portrait with which her lover had risen from among the dead.

The witness was sworn on the crucifix. She was asked her name.

"My name is Angustia de Salta," she replied with a marked foreign accent. "I am a native of Granada. I am thirty-three years of age."

She had rather the appearance of a woman ten years older.

"Well, madam," said the president. "I understand that you wish to make a statement to the court. Do you object?" he asked, looking at the opposing counsel in turn.

Both gentlemen preferred to hear what the witness had to say before examining her, and she was allowed to proceed. She gave her evidence in good English, but with a guttural accent.

"I was living in London," she began, "in the spring of 1898. I was teaching Spanish here. I became acquainted with a young officer." She paused, then as if screwing up her resolution, she announced, "He was the man for whose crime Captain Melrose suffered. His name was Walter Edgar Darnley."

There was a buzz of excitement in court. Benyon and Raines looked congratulations at each other.

"There now!" exclaimed Mrs. Gulf, mopping her brow.

The president made a note and pretended not to look surprised. "Proceed, madam," he said with a grand air.

"Lieutenant Darnley promised me marriage," continued the witness with bowed head, "I sacrificed much for him. He told me that he was in debt and would have to leave the army. He gambled—he had money as you say on horses. At his bidding, I used to take letters two or three times a week to a tobacconist's in Wardour Street. One day I became suspicious. I conceived the idea that he might be using me in order to communicate with some other woman. I watched for the person who came for the letters. It was a man. I followed him, and he went into the German Embassy. Then I guessed what was happening. I tore open a letter left for me at the shop, and found it contained German banknotes. I continued to take the letters till

I heard that Captain Melrose had been arrested. I implored Darnley to save him. He told me that if he interfered he would be shot. Then he was ordered to Gibraltar. I met him one Sunday at Tarifa, and we were secretly married at the parish church. We joined hands and exchanged rings during the holy Mass at the moment of the Benediction. In the sight of heaven we were truly married."

"I have not much more to tell you, gentlemen," continued Angustia de Salta. "My husband often visited me at Ronda under the name of Dominguez. One day he told me he had left the army, and that we would go to America. He had first, he told me, to go to Cadiz, and would then send for me. I was to wait for him at Cordova. He never came. I have never seen or heard from him since the day we parted at Bobadilla Station."

The Spanish woman bowed to the court and clutched the edge of the box for support. She seemed about to faint. Mrs. Gulf, seeing this, rose to her feet, considerably disturbing the reporters in the process, and waddled over to the witness's side. "There, there," she adjured her soothingly. "Smell some of this!" and she thrust an enormous cut-glass bottle beneath her nose.

The president regarded her with gruff good humour. "Take her outside in the corridor if you like," he said. "This room's infernally stuffy."

Leaning upon the kindly landlady, the Spanish woman walked across the court room. Rhona stood up to follow her with her eyes. The door was flung open by the sentry. Immediately on the other side, exposed to the full view of the court, two men stood, by their attitudes evidently in fierce altercation, while Mollie Fitzroy stood between them, her finger raised

to her lips. The men turned as the door was flung open. Rhona recognised them as Logan and Dermbach.

She saw both stare as if transfixed at the woman on Mrs. Gulf's arm. The next moment Angustia de Salta sprang towards Dermbach, who with a piercing cry fell to the ground.

In an instant all in court sprang to their feet and surrounded the group in the doorway. Rhona, struggling she never knew how, to the front, found the dark woman held back by Logan, of whose presence she hardly seemed conscious, so intent was she on the man at her feet. A stream of blood was issuing from Dermbach's breast. He struggled to his knees, upheld by Mollie.

"It's quite fair," he gasped. "She's stabbed me. I'm the man who ruined her. I'm Darnley. I suppose you had begun to find it all out by this time. . . . You have done for me, Angustia. . . . Well, I don't blame you. Here, carry me somewhere."

A surgeon was already bending over him and doing his best to staunch the wound. Logan quietly wrested a dagger from Miss de Salta's hand, and looked her searchingly in the face. "Have you ever seen me before, woman?" he asked, not noticing Rhona at his side.

"You? Who are you?" asked the woman indifferently; then struggling in his grasp, she implored him in French and Spanish to let her go to her querido Edgardo, son bien aimé, son amour. . . .

"Mad as a March hare!" remarked the airman, quietly surrendering her to a policeman, who just then came up.

Then he turned and saw the look in Rhona's eyes. "I've never seen her before," he said, as if that was

the only question he could read there. Her hand sought his and he heard the word, "Forgive!"

The president seized Rhona's arm. "Look here, young lady," he said brusquely. "This is a dashed lucky shot for you, whatever it may be for that poor beggar. He's dying, and if you want to clear your father's name, you had better come and get his confession. Where the devil is that lawyer of yours?"

But no one could see Mr. Raines.

Rhona, her hand in her lover's, followed the judges and the counsel into a lobby. Darnley was stretched on a couch, the surgeon bending over him. "Well," he said to Logan, "you have had your revenge."

"I'm sorry, man," said the airman simply. "I had rather it had been a straight fight."

"Give me a cigarette," implored the dying man. "We used to be friends, you know, out there at Palmiste. I remembered you at Frankfort. You were a young English chap down on your luck. . . . A very decent boy. . . . What the deuce was your name? Oh, I forget. . . . You came from Chepstow, anyhow. . . . Chepstow in Wales. Do you remember now?"

The bystanders looked from one to the other, astounded by the unexpected turn of the dying man's confession. "Yes, I seem to remember," said Logan slowly. "It will come back to me presently. . . . But how about her photograph?"

"Oh, that! It was in my coat, that's all. It wasn't your coat at all. . . . I left the town the night before the catastrophe. . . . Well, good-bye, old man. I'm sorry I had to smash the machine, but you're an Englishman you see, whether you like it or not, so you ought to be glad. . . . The War Office have got the plans all right."

The wounded man's voice was growing fainter. He

beckoned to the president. "Get my confession ready. I sold the secrets. . . . Damned Germans! . . . I've tried to make amends. . . . Been spying on them for years now, yes, and risked my life. . . . The War Office knows what my work is worth—of course they didn't know who I was. . . . I've made it up to England—by God! yes—pressed down and brimming measure—but not to you—not to you!"

He looked wildly at Rhona. All her resentment changed to pity. She bent over him.

"I did it for your mother," he whispered. "I loved her—I can't tell you how much. She was desperately poor, and frightfully in debt. It was the only means by which I could get money for her. I had got into debt on her account myself. Then—when she knew—she turned on me so fiercely that, all of a sudden, I felt consumed with hatred of your father. But I didn't try to fasten the guilt on him. I would have saved him at the eleventh hour, but I was a coward—I funk'd it. Forgive if you can—I have suffered a good deal. I tried to be your friend. I would have helped you if I could."

"I forgive you, Lieutenant Darnley," said Rhona, her tears streaming fast. "My father will forgive you, too."

The wounded man passed his hand across his brow. He looked at the surgeon.

"Take her away," he whispered, "I want to see poor Angustia—and there's that confession to sign. I can't hold out much longer. Give me some oxygen or some stuff of that sort." The others drew nearer. He looked at the president of the court-martial. "Say a good word for me if you can with the country and the service. You will find those papers useful."

He signed the confession with a trembling hand.

"Good-bye, everybody," he murmured in a voice audible only to Logan and the surgeon who stood at his head. "An interesting life, damn it. . . . Why didn't you shoot me, Logan? instead of her. . . . Dulce et decorum est pro. . . . No ill-feeling, eh?"

Logan shook the cold hand, and pushed Rhona out of the room before him. In the corridor they met Miss de Salta, on the arm of Mrs. Gulf, laughing and chatting volubly.

"Poor beggar!" observed the airman, lighting a cigarette abstractedly.

Mollie Fitzroy hustled past them. "What a scoop!" they heard her mutter, as she rushed into the courtyard.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THEY found themselves in St. James's Park. Rhona looked humbly at her lover. Her eyes were full of tears, her lips trembled. "Do say you forgive me!" she begged him.

And then, under the eyes of at least two policemen, an old lady, and a boy, Logan stooped and deliberately kissed her.

"Oh, it is good to be with you again!" she stammered. "I have so wanted you!"

He stared before him puzzled. "But what was it all about? And who am I anyway? And what's to be done now?"

"You've got to marry me—that's the next thing to do," she told him. "And I have a pretty good idea who you are. Will you come down with me to Chepstow to-morrow?"

"To Chepstow? Why, sure. And I remember the name, you know, clearly enough." He knitted his brow in the effort to remember. "Well, I daresay it will all come back to me when I get there. Yes, we'll go down to-morrow. But why did you throw me over?"

Rhona lowered her eyes. "We thought you were he—Darnley."

"Darnley? Well now, that's queer! Who put that idea in your head?"

"Mr. Raines."

"Your lawyer. He seems to have been interested in me—Mr. Raines. I want to meet him."

"I want you to meet him, too. I'll tell you about him to-morrow, if my guess is correct. But to-day is just for ourselves. Let's get back to the flat, Maurice. Oh, I want to hear that you still love me—to kiss you, my dear, my dear. . . .!"

* * * * *

They travelled down into the West Country by a very early train. As soon as they were snugly installed in the warm railway carriage, Rhona showed her fiancé a sheaf of telegrams she had received the night before. One from St. Petersburg was signed Von Themar, another from Berlin was signed just Wilhelm.

"He took the smash-up of my machine very well," said the airman ruefully, handing back the imperial congratulations, "and said that no doubt I could build another as good. But the plan itself must now be in possession of the Government over here, and I can't figure out another different from it yet as good."

"Oh yes, you can," maintained Rhona, tucking herself more comfortably into her travelling rug; "but you must do it for England next time. Remember you are an Englishman now."

He shook his head. "It's a dirty business this," he said. "I guess I'll quit it for good. Germany and England must cut each other's throats without my assistance. Your father—this poor devil, Darnley—both sacrificed on the altar of nationality. The next airship I build won't be for military purposes."

He relapsed into thought and surveyed the country through the frosty window pane. "I believe you are right about my being an Englishman," he said. "All this seems vaguely familiar to me."

He became more and more thoughtful after they had emerged from the Severn Tunnel, and studied the landscape with troubled eyes. They walked out of the station into Chepstow's quiet streets. He drew a deep breath and stood still, looking round. "Sure," he muttered, "I've been here before. It's the same old place."

They moved on a few paces and he laughed outright. "Well, well. This is mighty queer. I feel as if I had left the place only yesterday, and here it has been lying buried at the back of my brain all these years."

He halted outside the chief inn. "I used to play billiards here," he said, "let's go in." But no one appeared to recognise him. He stood for a moment looking hard at his surroundings; then he inquired abruptly after Evan Morgan, the billiard marker. He was told he had owned the King Henry Inn on the Caerleon Road for ten years past.

"After him!" cried Rhona with enthusiasm. They hired a trap and started off at a brisk trot, leaving the people at the hostelry sleepily wondering.

"I've driven this way before," observed Maurice with conviction, as he slowed up at the first hill. Rhona trembled too much to speak. Even now the revelation of her lover's identity might be fraught with pain for him and for her.

"This would be the inn," he said as they came in sight of a picturesque building with a sign swinging before it at the cross-roads, "and, by Jupiter! I know it as well as I know the colour of your eyes."

Rhona shaded her eyes with her hands and gazed long and earnestly at the wayside inn. A smile of relief and thankfulness came over her face. "So do I know it," she said quietly. "It is where you used to play bowls—Mr. Clive Standring!"

He gripped the reins so tightly that the horse stopped. He stifled a cry and stared at her.

"Sure, you have got it. Clive Standring—that's my name, that's me."

He continued to stare at her till she roused him from his stupefaction with a kiss.

Then he broke into a peal of laughter and jerked the rein. "What a fool I must have been not to remember my own name. And I've been calling myself Maurice Logan. Of course, I'm just Clive Standring."

"You will always be Maurice to me," said Rhona. "It's your new self that I have loved, and your new self that I want you to remain."

"There wasn't much difference between us, now that I come to think of it, girlie, though I've sobered down considerably since then, I grant. My home was just over there at Fair Oaks. My uncle couldn't stand my pranks, so I just started off with a five-pound note to make my fortune. I must tell you about those adventures presently. Lord, how it all comes back to me! I wonder if my uncle is alive."

"No, he isn't," Rhona informed him. "He died several years ago, and Mr. Raines, my solicitor, is in possession of the estate. He holds it merely in trust for you. I see now why he wanted to get you out of England."

"We'll get him out of the old house instead." Maurice checked the horse at the signpost. The proprietor was standing at the door of the inn, smoking a long pipe and placidly surveying the landscape.

The newcomer looked him up and down with an amused air.

"Well, Gaffer Morgan, how's the old fluker? Don't you remember me?"

The man thus unceremoniously addressed came forward and peered curiously at the speaker. Then he gave his leg a resounding slap. "Mr. Clive, by all that's wonderful! Where on earth did you spring from, sir?"

The returned wanderer handed the reins to a boy standing near, sprang to the ground, and, taking Mr. Morgan by the button of his waistcoat, pulled him backward and forward. Then the two men shook hands several times and pledged each other in big tankards which another boy had tactfully fetched from the bar. Rhona, sitting in the trap, looked on shyly and amused.

"Well, what's doing up at Fair Oaks?" inquired Maurice. "My uncle is dead, I hear, and the estate in the hands of a man called Raines."

"Yes, but it's yours, Mr. Clive," said the innkeeper eagerly. "Everyone round here knows that. Why, sir, we've talked over your uncle's will till most of us could tell you it by heart. I suppose you don't remember Mr. Raines, sir? He was a distant cousin on the Welsh side from Caernarvonshire. He obtained great influence over the old gentleman when you had gone, and he was left the estate in trust for you. If you didn't turn up within his lifetime it was to be his—or rather his heirs'—absolutely. Well, now you are back again, and the old place is yours."

The heir of the Standrings looked at Rhona. "Well, what do you say? Shall we go up and look at my old home?"

"Yes, of course we must. It seems strange I should return to it this way. I was staying there last month.

"Mr. Raines is there now, I believe," put in Evan Morgan. "I was told he came down last night."

"Up with you," said the heir, hoisting the inn-

keeper on to the back seat of the trap. "You may be useful up there. Now for some fun."

He was in boyish spirits. The last thirteen years seemed to have dropped away like a discarded mantle, and he felt himself once more the light-hearted, dare-devil scapegrace among his cronies of the countryside. He took the corners of the lanes as recklessly as when he and the girl at his side drove back through the darkness to Wiesbaden. The sight of the home of his fathers sobered him a little, and he slowed up for a better view.

"I had some good times round here, eh, Morgan?" he said, describing a half-circle with his whip.

"Rattling good times, sir," agreed the former billiard marker, "and not a soul within ten miles as didn't love you."

They drove up the avenue and reached the door at which Rhona and her aunt had alighted barely a month before. The footman looked wonderingly at Rhona and her tall companion.

"Tell Mr. Raines that I and a friend are here," said the girl.

They left Morgan holding the reins and were conducted into the small reception room at the foot of the stairs. As soon as the door closed on them Clive caught Rhona in his arms and kissed her. "Welcome," he said, "to your home and mine."

It was a very astonished and perturbed Mr. Raines who presently appeared. He shook hands with Rhona and nodded with an affectation of haughtiness at the man with her.

"I am delighted to see you, of course, Miss Melrose," he stammered. "I presume it is my duty to congratulate you on your reconciliation with Mr. Logan."

"Thanks for the congratulations," said the airman

" but I'm not Mr. Logan, as I now discover, but your cousin, Clive Standring, and, as I understand, heir to this estate. I'm sorry to put it so bluntly and I imagine that this will be an unpleasant surprise for you, but the fact might as well be announced now as later."

The lawyer was probably prepared for this announcement, for he did not change colour or exhibit any emotion.

" Please sit down, both of you," he said politely.

They obeyed him. " I fancy," he said very calmly, fixing his eyes on Maurice, " that you have been misled by the extraordinary likeness which, in fact, startled me, when I first saw your photograph in the newspapers. Of course, I promptly made inquiries and found that you couldn't possibly be Clive Standring. He died, poor lad, years ago, and I am only awaiting the positive proofs of his death." Mr. Raines took off his pince-nez and put them on again. " I have a shrewd suspicion who you are, Mr. Logan, but it is better for you that you shouldn't know. That's why I encouraged myself and Miss Melrose in the belief that you were that unfortunate man Darnley."

Rhona smiled sarcastically. " You might have pitched upon a less objectionable character while you were about it," she observed dryly.

The airman laughed good humouredly. " You have done that very well, cousin Owen, very well indeed. With a little time and patience no doubt you would be able to prove that I was the Man in the Iron Mask. Meantime, there's old Morgan outside, and I doubt not half the countryside, ready to swear to my identity. For that matter, the portrait gallery ought to establish it to most people's satisfaction."

He moved towards the door. Raines stepped before him, and was quietly and firmly put on one side. Rhona

and the angry solicitor following, Maurice strode without hesitation to the door of the gallery, which happened to stand open. He waved his hand towards the portraits. The likeness between him and the generations of dead Standrings was startling.

"I know now why you would not let me see the gallery," said Rhona, in a low voice, to Raines.

The man winced, and for the first time paled. His cousin stepped out on to the terrace and surveyed it with an air of proprietorship. "Hullo!" he cried, indignantly. "Why aren't the fountains playing?"

"They don't know where the spring is," explained Rhona.

"Well, I'll show them," said her fiancé. Then, before the astonished eyes of the gardener, he stooped down, loosened a slab, raised it, and appeared to press a lever underneath. There was a rushing, gurgling sound, and the next moment three tall jets of water spouted into the air from the mouths of the tritons.

"Pretty effect, isn't it?" remarked Clive Standring, surveying it approvingly. He turned to Raines, who, pale as a ghost, stood playing with his seals. "You see, I'm the missing heir, right enough, and there's no sense in your fighting. Of course, we'll have in old Morgan and the parson and the rest of them to identify me, and I'll trace my movements to your or the court's satisfaction. But you may as well own yourself beat."

Raines forced a laugh. "It looks like it, I admit. Well, you can't blame me for holding on as long as I could. This means total ruin for me. I have to account to you for—"

Clive Standring interrupted him. "Accounts be hanged! You are quite welcome to whatever you have got out of the estate so far. And, as for being ruined, you seem to have a pretty comfortable practice up in

London. I dare say I shall want you to manage the property for me, for I don't reckon on passing most of my life in a little place like this. I guess Rhona will find New York City livelier."

" You are exceedingly generous," began the solicitor, blushing like a schoolgirl.

Rhona gave him one hand and extended the other to her lover. " We can afford to be, Mr. Raines, and we don't forget that you helped to clear my father. And I want to be friends with everybody, for—well, Maurice and I are to be married to-morrow."

THE END

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